DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 459 886 JC 020 083

AUTHOR	Leech, Nancy G.
TITLE	Pilgrims on a Stony Path: Seeking Enhanced Literacy at the Community College.
PUB DATE	2000-08-00
NOTE	235p.; Doctoral Dissertation, Indiana University of Pennsylvania.
PUB TYPE	Dissertations/Theses - Doctoral Dissertations (041)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC10 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Access to Education; Adult Education; College Faculty; *College Role; *Community Colleges; Curriculum Development; Program Implementation; Remedial Instruction; *Student Attitudes; *Student Educational Objectives; *Student Needs; Teacher Student Relationship; *Two Year College Students; Two Year Colleges

ABSTRACT

This document is a qualitative study on the literacy enhancement of community college students and the role that community colleges served in assisting this enhancement. Data collection was done through ethnographic interviews of seven community college students in order to determine what factors put these individuals on a literacy path initially and what factors worked to keep them there, in spite of obstacles. The findings indicated that intrinsic and extrinsic motivators were present for all participants. The improvement of communication and access were predominant responses. Meeting employment credentials and the internal desire for personal knowledge and learning were also stated as factors from the students. The study provides implications to community faculty and literacy workers on ways to enhance the literacy of students or literacy program participants. The use of real-life, practical examples and strategies is suggested. The document also states that instruction should address and be relevant to the individualized needs of the students. The document contains demographics on community colleges and community college literacy programs. It also includes three appendices with the interview topics, sample responses, and variable coding. (Contains 47 references.) (MKF)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 459 886

PILGRIMS ON A STONY PATH: SEEKING ENHANCED LITERACY AT THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate School and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Nancy G. Leech

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

August 2000

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
N. Leech
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
1

JC020083

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

JC020083

© 2000 by Nancy Goldthwaite Leech

All Rights Reserved

Title: Pilgrims on a Stony Path: Seeking Enhanced Literacy at the Community College

Author: Nancy G. Leech

Dissertation Chair: Dr. Bennett Rafoth

Dissertation Committee Members: Dr. Barbara Hill Hudson
Dr. Michael M. Williamson

This study is an attempt to analyze the success of certain exceptional members of the community college as they pursue a path to higher literacy. The aim of the study was to determine what factors put these individuals on a literacy path initially and what factors worked to keep them there in spite of obstacles.

A case study method was used to elicit the literacy biographies of seven individuals who were determined to have qualities that defined them as successful seekers of higher literacy. Special attention was paid to three things: 1)examples of each one's literacy practices; 2) the sources of motivation at work in each one; and 3) the role that the community college played in each one's journey. The interviews revealed, first of all, that literacy efforts are largely initiated and sustained by the purposes to which each individual needs to apply them. Purposes such as voice and access were found to predominate. Sources of motivation were found to be a complex mixture of intrinsic and extrinsic. The extrinsic motivation of the need for credentials was almost always apparent, but it was often combined with the more intrinsic desire for knowledge for its own sake and joy in learning. Additionally, participants evidenced a high degree of both metacognition and problem-solving. In every case the community college setting proved to be a pivotal factor in the participants' progress.

The implication of the study is that, as literacy workers, composition teachers in the community college see students as the whole people that they are, complete with their obstacles, fears, hopes and dreams. Problem-solving tools and metacognitive strategies should be shared with them, and composition instruction should tap into the purposes and visions of each individual in order to make the literacy enterprise relevant.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My first and most profound gratitude goes to my dissertation advisor, Ben Rafoth. Not only did he help me believe that I had a dissertation in me at a time when I was not at all sure of that, but he also, through patient conversation, drew out of me the very topic about which I could be the most passionate. He has been an enthusiastic audience and collaborator, thus making the whole dissertation experience a generative and fulfilling step for me on my own stony path.

Thanks also to my two other readers: Mike Williamson, who advised me through my coursework, taught me to love e-mail, and propped me up when my resolve wavered; and Barbara Hudson, who gave me room to write one of the most satisfying graduate papers of my career. Both of these readers provided practical and broadening advice at the outset of my study.

My IUP study buddies were the best: Ann Ott, Flora Conley, Etheline Thomas, Tom Farrell, and Harold Ackerman, who came to my dorm room two nights a week during that first summer and provided a half-hour of side-splitting comedy followed by two hours of serious intellectual work. They made that summer sing with life. Flora has kept me laughing ever since, and Ann—I can only say that many times she has restored my soul. Thanks also to another classmate, Beth Boquet, for her amazing generosity of intellect. Whatever she knows, she shares.

And thanks to Dr. Clara Lee R. Moody, who cautioned us to "never be ABD", to Dr. Peter Fries, who reminded us to "get out of the way and let them learn", and especially to my sisters, who taught me to read (among many other things). And to my

children, Stephanie, Ben, Gabe and Rachel, who so graciously accommodated to sharing their mother with her intellectual pursuits.

But most special thanks go to the students, these pilgrims and all the others that I've met over the years, who have made me laugh and cry, have taught me more about how people learn that I ever could've read in a book, and have taught me how to be a teacher.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter Page

I INTRODUCTION.....1

II LITERACY, MOTIVATION AND THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE.....9
  Literacy.....10
  Motivation.....18
  The Community College.....23

III THE STUDY.....29

IV "WHY ARE THEY HIDING THESE MESSAGES IN THESE STORIES?".....39

V "I'M SICK OF YESSING".....59

VI "TAKE THE REARVIEW MIRROR AND THROW IT AWAY.".....79

VII "I KNOW HOW TO DO THAT; I'LL HELP YOU.".....95

VIII "WHAT'S THE POINT OF BEING HERE FIVE YEARS DOING NOTHING?".....110

IX "THERE IS STILL A PLACE FOR ME.".....131

X "I WANT MY OWN WORDS TO BE HEARD.".....150

XI AM I A PILGRIM, TOO?.....160

XII DISCUSSION.....195

XIII CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS.....205

REFERENCES.....213

APPENDICES.....219
  Appendix A – Interview Topics.....219
  Appendix B – Sample Transcript.....220
  Appendix C – Coding Categories.....227

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

When you teach, you notice things about students. When the subject you teach is composition, perhaps there's more out there to notice, since the teaching is about language, and language is a personal thing. If the majority of your teaching happens to take place in a writing center on the campus of a community college, you tend to see many writers who are in extremis about this very personal thing called writing. Over the years working in this kind of setting, most of my noticings have been what one might call diffuse and intuitive, kind of generalized feelings and insights about what kinds of binds students find themselves in as they write, and what kinds of techniques might work effectively for them. Although sometimes these feelings and insights can be articulated, most of the time they cannot, coming as they do from the complex nature of the coach/writer relationship working in the complex realm of language.

One phenomenon has surfaced again and again before my eyes over these years, that of the occasional client who was totally and utterly bent on achieving a higher level of literacy and willing to do anything to achieve this goal. These clients have appeared in every form imaginable, every age, gender, race, ethnicity, economic and social class, and with all kinds of mental and physical abilities and challenges.

There have been those who are hampered by language-related learning disabilities that are so severe that you or I might feel justified in giving up, and yet the power of their intellects and the dreams they have for themselves will not allow defeat. There have been those operating in a second language, forced to learn not only the literacy of reading and writing in English, but also that of a new culture in order to express themselves and achieve the place in society that they envision for themselves. There have been those, usually more advanced in years, who so value the uniqueness of their own lived experience that they are driven to recreate these stories in writing to share with others. And there have been those who have experienced the learning of writing for a mundane goal only to transform it into an unexpected gift to be transferred to the pursuit of their own personal desire. These individuals are motivated to walk on a path that leads them to a higher level of literacy; they have persisted on this path even when circumstances would seem to be against them. They are stubborn in their quest, they are obsessed with their goals that depend on such literacy, and they seemingly have no choice but to keep on. Some have experienced a specific turning point that put them on this path. For others, the motivation was always there but needed the opportunity of circumstance. They all tend to be quite reflective about their own processes, willing to seek out the resources that they need to advance their goals, and philosophical in the face of setbacks. How they got this way and what keeps them going should be of interest to us as teaching professionals. They may be exceptional, but there are factors which led them to their current state. Maybe if we could understand these factors better, we could, as Villanueva (1993) suggests, discover some ways "…to make the exception the rule" (xviii).

Dell, for instance, arrived at his community college destination as a clueless high school graduate, bereft of academic skills and personal goals, except that he wanted to do what his friends were doing. His community college experience has turned him into a knowledgeable planner with clear goals for his future and a clear idea of how to reach them. James, who had become a musician in high school to avoid academic challenges that were beyond him, has now found that literature is what he was always looking for and plans to be a college professor. Indiana, a faculty member who managed to avoid writing all the way through graduate school, now finds that writing is the center of his life and has been his salvation in overcoming a serious head injury. Sarah and Komal, both second language students, have found that the community college gave them a place to find themselves and to successfully meet the challenges of academic literacy so that they could move on toward important careers. Sid, who began at the community college as a welfare mother in spite of profound dyslexia, developed the literate know how to pursue her real dream, to become a lawyer. And Ronnie, a senior citizen bent on creating his own autobiography in print, has achieved the satisfaction of completing the first four hundred pages and has plans to create at least two more books.

As I've come to know these individuals through an extended association, my response has been one of awe, admiration, and many times, tears of wonder, amazement and respect. I have felt privileged to know them, and honored to share whatever of my expertise that could support their journeys. I've been inspired, challenged, and instructed by them. They have fed my spirit, excited my intellect, and thanked me. When it came time for me to embark on a dissertation project, it seemed only fitting that my endeavor should somehow celebrate the journeys of those who have made me feel that I have the best and most important job in the world.

Every dissertation project must begin with questions that will focus the direction of the study. Questions have always swirled in my head about these pilgrims that I've met. It's difficult to narrow this myriad down to a manageable few that will, I hope, be the most productive. But essentially I want to know what made them the way they are, intent on enhancing their own use of language for their own purposes. What were the earliest experiences with reading and writing like for them? Where did they get the idea that it was important for them to either master academic literacy, or prevail in high levels of literacy in a second language, or become confident enough to employ writing for their own complex purposes? What motivates them to read and write in the face of difficulties and obstacles that for ordinary people would be legitimate excuses or reasons for quitting? And what keeps them wanting to advance their literacy year after year in spite of these difficulties and obstacles?

I must add at this point that, as I've lived with this subject over the last many months, I've come to one clear and firm realization. The reason that these people's journeys resonate so much for me is that in their stories I see pieces of my own. I, too, have persevered toward higher literacy on a difficult and sometimes discouraging path that I could not abandon. As a first-generation college student, I dropped out of school at twenty to get married. I stayed at home for most of twenty years raising four children on the edge of poverty, reading all the while every book on education, psychology, philosophy and theology that came my way. I tried out new ideas and sought diverse discussion partners. Because of the blessing of a distance education program, I was able to finish college at the age of forty-two, even though there were times when I felt as if I were taking food out of my children's mouths to pay for a course. I embarked on a graduate program even though my car was unreliable for the fifty-mile commute, and I was unable to apply for student loans because my husband consistently failed to file income tax returns. I dealt with childhood illnesses that invariably coincided with academic deadlines and housework that was not shared. Eventually, as a working single parent, I embarked on a PhD program that required leaving home for three ten-week summers and hoping that the children could take care of each other. I struggled to find the time during the working school year to prepare reading lists and study for comprehensive exams. I struggle even now to find the time and the focus during this school year of academic "restructuring", "reorganizing", and "downsizing" for putting these words on paper. This has been and continues to be my path. In the stories of these writing center pilgrims, I see a mirror of it. It's a mirror that I look into every day.

So I guess you could say that this dissertation is somewhat narcissistic or self-serving, celebrating them in order to celebrate myself. West (1996) says, ". . . I came to realize that in asking questions of others, I was asking questions of myself, and in wanting to understand the conditions for effective learning in others' lives, I wanted to understand more about these in my own. All research crosses boundaries between self and others, professional and personal lives" (p. 12). Mackall (1997) refers to this kind of inquiry as being locked up in our own stories (p. 81), but he also says, "Write what is in your heart, not what you think a dissertation has to be. Trust in the life you have lived and in the stories you believe need to be told" (p. 9). These pilgrims' stories are the ones that I believe need to be told.

Once the topic had been thought of, no other would do. I realized right away that its complexity would require me to struggle mightily to convey even a glimmer of the whole picture, but there was no turning back. The struggle seemed worth the price. A. H. Maslow once said that if we want to make people good, we should probably look closely at a few individuals whom the majority would characterize as good and find out how they got that way. I would like to perform a similar procedure on a few representatives of this band of pilgrims. But where could I begin to understand what makes them the way they are?

First of all, I needed to look at literature which I thought would relate to their situation. I decided that the first area that would need to be examined would be that of literacy itself, especially definitions that would be broad enough to encompass the whole range of literacies that pilgrims such as these are understanding and using. I wanted to honor the complexity of what I believed these pilgrims' stories would be, including attention to the literacy of culture, society, and the academic institution. Along with appropriate definitions, the "what' of literacy, I searched for material on the "how". How does literacy come about for people? Here I found a variety of theoretical materials and three major studies (Fingeret & Drennon, 1997; Lytle & Wolf, 1989; Merrifield, Brugman, Hemphill, & Bennett de Marrais, 1997) that investigated actual people moving into literacy. Although the populations that all of these studied were at a very basic level of literacy, I thought that there might still be comparisons in the process that was required, and, if not, at the very least they could offer some kind of a contrast.

In addition to research on literacy, I determined that information on motivation for learning in adults would be important. Motivation seemed key to understanding the determined nature of the population that I had in mind. What caused, or allowed, them to take the steps that I saw them taking in the interest of their own enhanced literacy? It seemed to me that the only way I could hope to begin to account for what kept them going was to look at larger research on adult motivation in general.

And finally, I wanted to look at the very nature of the community college and its mission to find factors that might be crucial to success for these pilgrims. I imagined that with the particular baggage that they brought with them, only the democratic and egalitarian nature of the community college could have provided the right environment for them to flourish.

Although here on paper I lay out these three areas as if they were discrete, it became apparent to me early on that they were, indeed, quite imbedded in one another. Sometimes it seemed that acts of literacy were themselves motivation; at other times it seemed that a motivation driven by purpose was the only thing creating a striving for literacy. And through it all, the nature of the community college seemed a good fit for both creating motivation and enabling progress in literacy. In my written review of the literature I have tried to depict this interconnection as clearly as I could.

Once the literature was reviewed, I determined that the best methodology was that of case studies of representatives of this larger group of literacy pilgrims, case studies of exceptional cases, if you will. I chose seven participants and conducted in-depth interviews with them led by questions that came out of the literature. The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed and analyzed. Then I wrote them up as much in the voices of my participants as I could. It was important to me that they speak for themselves and give their own perceptions of their literacy pilgrimage. I wanted to know how their journeys looked to them, in their own words. In the write-ups of their stories, I injected theory and comments from the literature where appropriate to bring out the significance, according to my lights, of what they were telling.

It is my hope that a study which allows and encourages participants such as these to speak in their own voices about their treks will help us as professionals to escape somewhat from the categories, labels and abstractions that come so naturally to us. Noddings and Witherell (1991), in their epilogue to Stories Lives Tell, affirm that "Stories can help us to understand by making the abstract concrete and accessible. What is only dimly perceived at the level of principle may become vivid and affectively powerful in the concrete" (p. 279). I hope that the reader will find this vividness and power in the stories that I collected.

The title of the study comes from Letters of a Nation, excerpts of which I heard read one day on public radio. The specific words come from a letter that Katherine Anne Porter wrote to the president of Colorado State College in 1951, during the height of the McCarthy era, explaining to him that she was turning down the offer of a teaching position there because of the loyalty oath that they required of all new employees. As soon as I heard the words "pilgrim on a stony path", I could think of no others to as adequately describe each of the participants in my study. When I later was able to read the book itself, the words seemed even more apt. Porter explains that her intentions for her teaching were not to involve herself in discussion of the flag, or laws, or communists or even Senator McCarthy. But rather, she said:

> I meant to talk about literature, life understood and loved in terms of the human heart in the personal experience. The life of the imagination and the search for the true meanings of our fate in this world, of the soul as *a pilgrim on a stony path* and of faithfulness to an ideal good and tenacity in the love of truth. (Carroll, p. 204-205)

Chapter Two

Literacy, Motivation, and the Community College

It would be fair to say that going into this study I had an intuitive sense, from having known all the participants for an extended period of time prior to the study, of the kinds of theoretical background I would need from the literature. I knew that definitions of literacy would be important, and especially a definition that would encompass a broad understanding of what literacy is. My study would not be about just functional reading and writing, but about the literacy of the system, the culture, and the awareness of the self and its place in the given context. In addition to a useful definition of literacy, I wanted some take on others' ideas of how literacy was generally acquired, what the conditions and progressions of this acquisition might have been seen to be. I also sensed that adult motivation, and its sources, would play an important part in understanding these pilgrims' journeys. And finally, I felt that the community college setting would itself prove to be a major influence on their progress, because of its open-enrollment nature, diverse student body, relationship to a specific local community, and emphasis on teaching.

Since my participants included those who had blossomed in the literacy of the written word late in life (Indiana and Ronnie), those who could read and write in more than one language (including English) but needed to learn the literacy of the system and the culture (Komal and Sarah), those whose obstacles to literacy had been raised by learning disabilities (James and Dell), and one who had overcome the double obstacle of learning disability and culture ( ), and since for many of them added burdens of economics and social stigma were part of the picture, I especially wanted to look at all this literature in the broadest way possible, because I suspected that there would be much intertwining among these different areas. For instance, I suspected that motivation would need to be very high in order for these people to overcome what they did in their pursuit of literacy, and I felt that the openness, egalitarianism, and teaching-centeredness of the community college would not only add a setting that would be conducive to motivation but would also give opportunities for a wide range of literacy practices.

Literacy

In the discussion of literacy in the published literature, I found a variety of definitions. Knoblauch (1990) provides a reason for this proliferation of definitions when he claims that definitions tell us only what some person or group wants literacy to be (74). I admit that I am probably one of those people he refers to, because I want a definition that describes the whole person in the context of his or her world. I like, for instance, the way Brandt (1990) amplifies the discussion of definitions of literacy as follows:

> …we…need definitions of standard literacy that are themselves less narrow and exclusionary, definitions in which context resonance and social solidarity, for instance are appreciated as aspects of literate orientation. That depends on finding new ways of imagining what literacy is and where it comes from, focusing less on outcomes and more on acts of writing and reading. We need to reconcile…cognitive models of literacy with social models, differentiate textual knowledge from literate

> know-how, and above all, recognize that what sustains literacy isn't a what but a "who". (p. 194)

The "context resonance" and the "social solidarity" that she mentions definitely apply to my participants as I know them. They were all dealing with specific contexts that were new to them, and especially Komal and Sarah were trying to maintain solidarity with traditional religious ways of life while at the same time seeking development in a secular intellectual way. Brandt's notion of a "social model" for literacy seems very central to me because I see my participants being pushed largely by a need and desire to connect with others through their words. And her idea of "literate know-how," as I began to see through my interviews, implies for me the application of what is learned formally with experiences outside that original setting. These pilgrims definitely remind me that literacy is a "who."

Further, in terms of literacy's cultural features, it seemed to me that an understanding of cultural practices and systems should be considered an important consideration in looking at the paths my pilgrims were on. Reading the culture as a text seems to apply not only to the participants from other cultures moving into the culture of the United States, but also to the native-born participants who were moving either from a home culture into the outside world, or from a public school culture into higher education, or from one disciplinary field into a different one. Each one, in his or her way, was opting to follow a path that no one they knew had traveled before. Both Newman and Beverstock (1990), who claim that literacy involves "the many dimensions of our many cultures (p. 7), and Wagner (1986), who states that literacy is "a super ordinate category which subsumes all varieties of reading and writing skills as well as *any cultural* *features interacting directly or indirectly with literacy in the society*." (p. 320), seem to recognize this idea of cultural literacy. Merrifield (1997), too, concludes that literacy is broader than "life skills" and can involve cultural and social maintenance. (p. 41)

Some theorists attempt to break literacy down into its aspects, and I thought this approach might prove helpful in analyzing my pilgrims' stories. Lytle and Wolf (1989) describe four aspects of literacy: skills, tasks, practices, and critical reflection. (pp. 7-11) However, Fingeret and Drennon (1997) take issue with these divisions. They believe that, "Literacy as skills denies the role of meaning in literacy; literacy as tasks denies the role of social context". (p. 62) Since these participants' journeys are clearly related to the social contexts that they find themselves in, and since, again clearly, their uses of literacy are fraught with meaning as they pursue their own goals and purposes, I would have to side with Fingeret and Drennon on this point.

Although Fingeret and Drennon are more receptive to Lyle and Wolf's notion of practices, they would elaborate on this aspect by including not just the doing of tasks, "but doing them as other people do them in the same situation" (p. 63), not just doing tasks to meet goals, but to fit in. Delattre (1983) echoes this notion of fitting in when he says the following:

> …being literate is just more fun, more joyful, than being illiterate. It is more fun to be an insider than to be excluded…It is more fun to grasp language with sufficient skill to be able to understand ideas—one's own and those of others—than to be limited to a shapeless, rough vagueness about nearly everything. (p. 54)

It's hard for me to imagine that the independence and self-direction my participants exhibit would lend itself to this idea of fitting in, but I think the insider/outsider phenomenon needs to be explored with them.

Fingeret and Drennon (1997) remind us that "Literacy—even when viewed as practices—is not an end in itself. It is always connected to some broader purpose…" (p. 64), and they refer to Stein's (1995) description of purposes: literacy for access and orientation, literacy as voice, literacy for independence, and literacy as a bridge to the future. (p. 9) They seem to believe that the ultimate purpose for adults pursuing literacy is the desire to change their lives. I can see evidence of Stein's purposes in what I already know of the participants. It is readily observable that many of them are clamoring for access into a different discourse community. And many exhibit a desire to have their voices, their words heard. In terms of literacy for independence, I can see that for many of my participants the independence is that of economics, but there might also be the sense of doing things "my way," perhaps the result of traveling a path which they are inventing as they go along. And certainly, even in some sense for the senior citizen who participated in my study, there is a large element of looking toward a better future because of increased use of literacy.

So we have moved from definitions of literacy, through definitions that seek to divide literacy into aspects, and finally to the purposes of literacy. This progression makes me think that it is impossible to define literacy without including its many faces and its ultimate purposes. It seems that literacy must be directed toward something, and that what that something is will depend on the individual using and developing literacy. For some, the something may be quite utilitarian, while for others it might be toward a more abstract end. Fingeret and Drennon's larger picture, that adults' main purpose in pursuing literacy is that of changing their lives is definitely one worth looking for in the texts of my participants interviews, however, as are the categories of purpose defined by Stein.

One thing that I anticipated finding as a common denominator in my participants is an increase in self-knowledge. The kind of growth that I had seen them experience would certainly imply that. There is little in the literature that relates to definitions of literacy that implies this kind of self-knowledge. The closest to such a reference is Chaplin's (1993) description of literacy as "the ability to get in touch with *oneself* and with others and to use what is learned…to forge ahead in the face of obstacles that one may encounter in present circumstances or future endeavors." (p. 196) I suppose that it is fair and useful to combine this knowledge of self with the ability to problem-solve. The latter would seem to depend on the former, and might also depend on a large degree of self-confidence. This understanding also seems to echo Brandt's (1990) idea of "literate know-how". This concept will certainly connect with my discussion of problem solving when I get into the literature about motivation.

Beyond mere definitions of literacy, and even purposes, I felt the need to consider the effects of literacy in individuals. Fingeret and Drennon (1997) remind us that literacy changes people (p.1), and Lytle and Wolf attempt to describe in detail what some of these changes are. They see moving into literacy as having the following effects: "…encouragement of children's intellectual and academic achievement, participation in community activities, increased communication in the workplace, increased self-esteem, and increased self-determination." (p. 66) Although not all of these descriptions can be appropriately applied to all the participants, since some don't have children, and some don't have jobs, this understanding of the effects of literacy should provide a good general checklist to be applied to the participants.

Another aspect of literacy to be considered is its relationship to both power and knowledge. It is clear that the acquisition of higher levels of literacy must impact on individuals in these two spheres. I suspected that the effect might be a reciprocal one, and Reder (1998) describes such an effect. He posits a reciprocal model in which literacy and educational attainment affect each other equally. (p. 144) I suspect that the same reciprocity occurs between literacy and power and literacy and knowledge, each one feeding, facilitating, and motivating the other. Daniell (1990) reminds us that "Ignoring the power relations of the situation while assuming the capacity of literacy to automatically bestow culture-specific cognitive patterns reifies literacy and separates it from the concerns of the learners" (p. 205) So it isn't just the reading and writing as simple skills that make a difference; it's the uses and purposes to which those skills are put. This idea echoes back to Brandt's "literate know-how" and Fingeret and Drennon's reminder that literacy must always be connected to some larger purpose. The power of the written word only appears when it is actively used. Reciprocity comes to the fore again as we read Power (1983), who sees the connection between literacy and power as a two-way street. "…just as literacy often gives people access to power, power generally gives people access to literacy." (p.24). One feeds and informs the other. Will my pilgrims' narratives exhibit this reciprocity?

If literacy and power work reciprocally, what about literacy and knowledge? Brandt (1990) beats the drum for the "deep and abiding" (p. 189) connection between literacy and knowledge. "Desire for knowledge", she says, "contributes to the allure of literacy…knowledge is the heart of literacy's value and power, its fundamental goal and most tangible product" (p.). It will be interesting to see how the participants view the search for knowledge. This area will be talked about, too, as I review the literature on motivation.

The best definition of literacy that I found, one which would seem to encompass all the issues raised up until now, issues of purpose, of cultural and social context, of power and knowledge, and of personal initiative is one put forward by Richardson, Fisk and Okun (1983): "Literacy is the use of reading and writing as operations in service of a goal to accomplish transactions within a specific context." (p. 4) This definition is the best operating one for encompassing all that my participants might tell me.

Armed with a clearer idea of what literacy is, how broad its nature is and how tied it is to context and individual goals and purposes, it seemed beneficial also to think about how literacy happens. I planned to question my participants about how it happened for them, but it would be helpful to have other models and theories to compare these particulars to.

In their study of a basic literacy program, Fingeret and Drennon (1997) attempt to describe what they see as five accumulating conditions for the process of extensive change that accompanies increasing literacy (p. 105) and to configure these conditions into what they call a "spiral model" (p. 65-67). They see the individual pursuing literacy as moving through five stages, the first two representing background conditions (prolonged tension and a turning point), and the remaining three representing situational factors (problem solving and seeking educational opportunities, changing relationships and practices, and intensive continuing interaction). It should be helpful to examine my participants' narratives of their own journeys in the light of this model to see whether it applies beyond the basic literacy level and whether new factors come into play. This model does reflect the relationship of personal agency to "other conditions that are important to the change process, such as the social, political, and economic environment, effective instruction, and community" (p. 65).

This literature about literacy has raised many issues that could relate to my participants. I want to focus, however, on the issues that relate to my particular research questions: What put them on the literacy path? What keeps them there? In light of the first research question, I will especially look for a turning point that instigated a move to the path of higher literacy, and also at the issue of purpose in their entrance to the path, the notion of literacy being sought as a means of acquiring knowledge for its own sake, and the idea that literacy may be pursued as a means to acquiring insider status. In regard to the second research question, it will be important to note the role of literacy in overcoming obstacles that faced them and whether they have an interest in even further changes for themselves. Overall, to asses their position on the path to higher literacy it will be important to note what kind of changes have already happened to them as a result of their enhanced literacy, what kind of effects higher literacy has had on their family, community and work relationships and on their own self esteem and self determination. It will be especially interesting to compare their narratives to Fingeret and Drennon's spiral model to see whether the five aspects of it are revealed in the same way that they are for basic literacy participants or whether some new aspects emerge.

Although Fingeret and Drennon's spiral model has prepared us to look for the contextual considerations inherent with literacy acquisition, it does not reflect the personal resources, commitment, dreams and hard work that were a part of my research into definitions of literacy. For the personal component in the literacy quest, I needed to look at theories of motivation in adults.

Motivation

How does motivation happen in adults? And more especially, how does it happen so strongly and effectively in these exceptional pilgrims? What put them on the path to advanced literacy in the first place, and what keeps them there when the walking gets rough? Is their motivation strengthened by success, and/or do failure and difficulty have a role to play in spurring them on? Does their advancing literacy itself serve as a motivating factor to move even further in that direction? Is their motivation of an intrinsic nature, learning for the sake of knowing, or is it more extrinsic, fired by the need to be economically independent? And does how they view their own capabilities play a role? These were some of the questions that I brought to the literature on motivation. It was clear to me that each of my participants was involved in a process of planned actions to reach a goal. In this regard, Munro's (1997) definition of motivation simply as an explanation for coherent action (p. 5) is a place to start.

Much of the literature on motivation in adults approaches the subject from the perspective of pedagogy, in other words, how to teach in such a way as to inspire motivation. Although pedagogy was not on my mind as I pursued my study, some of the references seemed promising as descriptions of the way the participants might have learned to teach themselves. Wigg (1994), for instance, lists the following conditions for supporting motivation: 1) fostering areas of strength, 2) adapting curricula, 3) identifying potentials, and 4) rewarding successes (p. 166). Had someone done these things for my participants? Or had they, perhaps, learned to do them for themselves? Wlodkowski and Ginsberg (1995) list the following as the motivational goals of pedagogy: establishing inclusion (are we talking about the insider/outsider thing again here?), developing attitude, enhancing meaning, and engendering competence (p. 1). Once again, I found myself asking whether someone had had these goals for my participants, or whether they had recognized them for themselves. What had they actually experienced in terms of teaching that enhanced their drive toward higher literacy? Or, on the other hand, how had they learned to teach themselves?

Next I wanted to see what people had to say about the types of motivation, extrinsic and intrinsic. I found that Wlodkowski and Ginsberg (1995) tend to privilege intrinsic motivation over extrinsic, and to define intrinsic motivation as follows: "When one's actions are endorsed by oneself with a sense of integrity and cohesion, authenticity blends into self-determination and intrinsic motivation occurs" (p. 24). Although later, when I was reading about literacy in the community college, I found a study that claimed that motivation among community college students was largely extrinsic, I felt that this description of intrinsic motivation was more characteristic of my participants, maybe because they are exceptional.

In an earlier article written by himself, Wlodkowski (1985) had listed six pedagogical factors that impact on motivation in adults: attitude, need, stimulation, affect, competence and reinforcement (p. 45). He explained attitude as "a predisposition to respond favorably or unfavorably" (p. 45-46), need as "an internal force that leads the person to move in the direction of a goal (At this point I found myself wondering whether need is not sometimes motivated by an external force)" (p. 47), stimulation as "any change in our perception or experience with the environment that makes us active" (p. 51), affect as "learners feel[ing] something while learning" (p. 52), and competence as "successful interactions with their world" (p. 54). Will my pilgrims mention the presence of any or all of these factors during their journey? I will be paying special attention to this factor of need, or "internal force", because even before interviewing the participants in depth, this is a feature that I would attribute to every one of them. But will their experience also bear out some of these other factors, and, if so, will the source turn out to be their academic experience at the community college?

In the course of my library research, I came across two other notions that I might not have imagined to be a part of the motivation for higher literacy: the use of personal narrative as a source of motivation, and the practice of metacognitive behavior. Kashima (1997) views the human use of narrative or story telling as a factor in motivation (p. 17). He believes that narratives or stories "encode, aid recall, help regulate affect, and facilitate problem solving and planning" (p. 22). He thinks that because stories go beyond mere causes, such as ability, effort, task difficulty and luck, in explaining success and failure, they are perhaps more comprehensive motivational tools (p. 25). I couldn't help, when I read Kashima, but compare what he was saying to my own experience. I know that when things are difficult for me, I look back and tell myself a story of what I've accomplished before to keep me going. I decided that I really wanted to find out whether the participants do the same thing. "Narrative as genre", Kashima says, "sits between figurative and literal meaning, and touches on both. Likewise, human motivation stems from both internal and external sources, and depends on the real and imaginary. Narrative perhaps plays an important role in the story about human motivation" (p.27). Perhaps, by determining whether participants tell their own stories to themselves, I will also find a handle on the relationship between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

The sources that I found relating to the role of metacognition in motivation seemed to me related somehow to Kashima's notions of narrative as a source for motivation. I have believed for many years in the crucial part that metacognition plays in any intellectual endeavor. It has always seemed to me that the more we think about our own thinking and learn about our own learning, the better prepared we are to face the next challenge. Paris and Parecki (1993) think that metacognition, because it "entails reflection directed at orchestrating one's own behavior and thinking" (p. 7), contributes to motivation.

> The intensity of their motivation and the persistence of their education efforts may depend upon their metacognitive beliefs about the length of training necessary to make a difference, their personal ability or efficacy to profit from education, and their faith in the particular method of instruction that they have chosen. Thus, metacognition about literacy and their situation may affect their motivation and success (p. 19)

I would add to Paris and Parecki's list of beliefs a sense of knowing themselves in a progressively more thorough way. The reason that I see this idea of metacognition connecting to Kashima's notion of narrative is that metacognition may be contained in the stories they tell themselves. What these participants tell themselves about their literacy journey may prove to be crucial in their success and persistence.

The final surprise that I came across as I perused the literature on motivation were pieces devoted to the connections between failure and motivation. One would easily entertain the notion that success would be a reinforcement for motivation, but why failure? Since the participants in the study have faced sometimes overwhelming difficulties on their literacy journeys, however, it seemed to me that understanding the role of failure could prove to be important. Could it be that they are exceptional not in spite of the challenges that might have stopped them in their tracks but because of them?

Kalsner (1992) discusses failure as a kind of motivation in some individuals (p. 9). She describes a trait called self-efficacy, which she defines as narrower and more goal-specific than self-esteem. She sees self-efficacy as

> …a personal belief in one's capability or skill mastery necessary to attain a goal or execute a performance…Expectations of personal mastery may affect students' choices of activities, how much effort they will expend, and how long the effort will be sustained in the face of stressful situations. (p. 7)

She continues by contending that

> …individuals with a mastery orientation believe that failure is rectifiable…Mastery-oriented individuals cultivate cognitions that propel them to look toward the future, emphasize the positive, and invest their energies in actively pursuing solution-relevant strategies. (p. 8-9)

As Kalsner couches her statements in the notion of beliefs about themselves, I echoed back to Kashima's story telling and Paris and Parecki's metacognition. It would seem that all are saying that what people tell themselves about what they can do (and perhaps can't do) constitutes an important motivating factor.

Failure is the subject of Cavaliere's (1997) study, too, in which she characterized failure as feedback. This study reinforces her earlier findings that

> failure provided information to the learner that allowed for retesting, comparing, and contrasting of data and actions to develop corrective actions for future success…failure…had the power to motivate these learners to remain persistent in the face of defeat in order to solve their problems and accomplish their goals. (p. 14)

So, in both Kalsner and Caveliere, we see mention of the uses of failure for motivation, and for problem-solving behavior.

Several possible questions are raised by this review of literature on motivation that might shed light on the participants' journeys. Have they experienced the conditions for motivation in the educational setting? What role does their experience of failure play? Are the stories that they tell themselves about themselves a source of motivation? Do their stories connect internal and external sources of motivation? What are their metacognitive practices? Is there evidence of their self-efficacy and sense of mastery? Is their motivation largely intrinsic (out of a desire for knowledge) or extrinsic (out of economic need)?

The Community College

The final area of literature that I looked at relates to characteristics of the community college and its writing center that might have impacted the literacy journey of the participants in special ways. Did this setting matter to them on their journey? Did they, indeed, experience some of the conditions necessary for motivation in this setting? Did the community college provide opportunities for learning about the world and the self that facilitated the growth of their literacy?

The student participants in the study remind me of Mike Rose's student at UCLA, Lucia, about whom he realized "how many pieces had to fall into place each day in order for her to be a student…" (p. 185). They also fit Needham's thumbnail description of community college students in many ways:

> These students are pressed for time; they manage a job (often even two jobs), a home and a family. The life they build is often tenuous—one illness, extra overtime shift, problem with a secondhand car, or family disagreement can through their whole world into long-term chaos. (p. 16)

All the participants, student or otherwise, reflect the diversity that is found in a typical suburban metropolitan community college.

When the community college movement shifted into high gear during the late Fifties and early Sixties, its aim was to serve just such a clientele. It was driven by three main principles: the commitment to make access to higher education no further than fifty miles away from every U.S. citizen, the implementation of an "open door" policy that would not turn anyone away because of entrance requirements, and the tailoring of service to each unique community served. For many, this three-fold mission has provided a chance at higher education that was previously unattainable. Nell Ann Pickett (1998) characterizes community college as "democracy in action" (p. 90). She describes them as "…colleges that bring hope, opportunity, fulfillment of dreams to a large segment of our population for whom otherwise higher education would be very difficult if not impossible" (p. 98). Because of its accessibility, the community college serves a clientele that reflects a wider representation of the general population than schools with no open-enrollment policy.

According to Department of Education statistics, there were 1742 accredited community colleges in this country as of the 1996-1997 academic year. The number of associate's degrees had increased 24% in the years between 1985 and 1995. In 1996, nearly half of all those students in the United States who were enrolled in post-secondary education were enrolled in community colleges, and of those community college students, nearly half were over the age of 25. (U.S. Department of Education, 1999)

The open door of the community college, the diversity of its students, and the different levels of preparedness that its students bring, make pedagogy a priority. I think of all of us who teach at the community college, regardless of the discipline we profess to, as developmental educators. We must meet students where they are, regardless of their age, past experience, or cultural ties, and lead them to awareness of themselves and of the academic environment. I have to believe that the student-centeredness that is practiced in the community college and its interest in fostering self-development will prove to have a large part in the success and progress made by my pilgrims. It should connect closely with what I have read and reported on about the conditions that foster literacy and those that impact favorably on motivation.

The literacy situation in community colleges is an interesting one, and there are two points of view (positive and negative) in the literature about how well the community college fulfils its role in literacy building. Richardson, Okun and Fisk (1983) found, in a study conducted at a site in Illinois, that apparently community college curricula work against literacy in students, since the norm for classroom written language is what they call "bitting" (short answers) rather than "texting" (extended discourse) (p. 65). According to these researchers, "Oakwood students were not required to synthesize, analyze or evaluate information from text and lectures. Instead, they learned discrete pieces of information in order to recognize or reproduce them intact on objective exams" (p. 71). They go on to describe Oakwood's instructors as having "adapted their requirements for reading and writing by reducing or eliminating the need for students to compose or read connected discourse…instructors…contributed more to the problems of literacy than to its solutions" (p. 88).

And yet, in their analysis and application of the results of the National Adult Literacy Survey, Howard and Obertz (1998) discovered that the greatest number of community college graduates place exactly equidistant between those respondents who had no college and those who had baccalaureate degrees (p. 128-130). So obviously something is happening to literacy levels at the community college, and my participants seem to have derived great benefit from it.

Certainly one of the most important avenues of literacy building at the community college, one would expect, is the writing center. As the open door with the open door, the democracy within the democracy of the community college, it is uniquely placed to meet students where they are on their literacy path. The client/tutor relationship builds on strengths, needs, goals, and personal aspirations. Many arrive at the writing center at times of unusual stress and anxiety in their academic careers (many of our pilgrims' narratives will exemplify this truth). Mohr (1999) reminds us that "…teachable moments often arise out of conflict or a moment of 'need to know'" (p. 421). She goes on to say that "If a community college supports a writing center, its open door is not only preserved but also reinforced" (p. 424).

Given all these characteristics of the community college as a setting for literacy building, I should expect to find that my participants have found opportunity, support for their literacy development, and encouragement for their motivation within the walls of the community college. I think that for them the community college will prove to have made a difference.

This review of the literature left me with almost too many interesting things to ponder as I conducted my study. I felt it important now to narrow and focus this myriad into what I considered to be the most fundamental and most interesting of the questions raised.

About literacy, I had found a definition broad enough to suit the complexity of my participants' stories, and several notions of the purposes of literacy and its effects on those who practice it. I had come to see literacy in a broad context involving cultural and social aspects. I had been made aware of the insider/outsider nature of literacy efforts and literacy's connection to self-knowledge and problem solving. I had Fingeret and Drennon's spiral model of literacy acquisition, and several theories of literacy's relationship to knowledge and power. In terms of motivation, I had collected several descriptions of pedagogical means of fostering it and a comparison of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, along with theoretical understanding of the roles narrative, metagognition and failure play in creating motivation. And regarding the community college, I had brought together ideas relating to its accessibility, its centeredness on pedagogy and student development, and its literacy situation.

What remained as I began the interview phase of my study was to find ways to relate these various theories and models to my major research questions regarding my participants: what put them on the path to higher literacy in the first place, and what kept them there through obstacles and difficulties?

CHAPTER III

THE STUDY

This dissertation uses the method of case study to collect participants' own perceptions of their journeys toward higher literacy. In their literacy study, Merrifield, Brugman, Hamphill and Bennett de Marrais (1997) cite as their purposes 1) to examine their participants lives as wholes and 2) to understand them within context of culture, religion and personal domains of work, community, home and family (p. 2-3). The purposes of my study are similar. I chose seven participants for the study, based on my prior knowledge of them and their availability for interviews. I chose people who were committed to enhancing their own literacy levels as evidenced by behavior that I had personally witnessed, largely through their relationship with the writing center. I included a variety of ages, genders, and ethnicities.

For example, I included one male senior citizen from the community who visited the writing center for help in editing and revising his memoirs; one male faculty member whose technical background brought him to the writing center when he needed to write extensively for his department; two second language students, both women but of different ages, who are dealing with not only written texts but also the texts of the culture and the society; two young men who had come to proficiency in literacy only after attending the community college, having struggled with learning disabilities all their lives; and one almost young mother who had also come to literacy late because of profound dyslexia, and had huge battles to fight with the system. What they have in common, although the life situation and purposes of each are unique, is an intense desire to further their own literacy, almost to the point of obsession.

I invited these pilgrims to participate in my study and set up interview appointments for them. Since all but one of the participants were currently on campus on a regular basis, and since travelling off campus for interviews would have taken more time away from my work in the writing center, all the interviews were conducted on campus, either in my office during quiet times or in a secluded conference room in the nearby speech clinic if the writing center was particularly busy and noisy at the time. I offered to conduct Ronnie's interview in his home, since he was not regularly on campus, but he chose to come to campus for the occasion since the college had come to symbolize the seriousness of his writing for him. With each participant I conducted a ninety-minute interview that was tape-recorded.

I was humbled by the pilgrims' enthusiasm about participating. Although I had planned to use pseudonyms for them in the write-up of the study, I found that I had to really sell this idea to them. To a person, they thought it would be fine to use their own names, indicating to me not only a pride in what they had to say, but also a profound trust in me. When I brought out the informed consent forms for them to sign, once again they had to be convinced of the need. And the tape recorder never fazed any of them. Truthfully, I tended to forget about the tape recorder once the interview got under weigh, but not the pilgrims. They all evidenced an awareness that their words were being recorded, and they even seemed to welcome it. Ronnie worried when the red lights went of (it was a voice-activated recorder) that some of what we were saying was not being picked up. And Dell, at a couple of points, actually looked right at the tape recorder and said, "This is for the home audience." Likewise, as I got totally wrapped up in the immediacy of what they were telling me, they stayed aware that the purpose of the interview was to help me with my study. Comments such as "I don't know if this will help you with your study, but. . .", "I don't know if this is what you need, but. . ." and "I know you probably want me to say X, but. . ." let me know that they never forgot what they were involved in.

My purpose in doing case studies of these participants was to uncover their perceptions of what had put them on this path toward enhanced and enlarged literacy and what keeps them there. Although I had my version of these participants; stories, the point of this study was to uncover their perceptions and relate them to my research questions. Paris and Parecki (1993) suggest that we need research regarding personal theories about oneself and the use of literacy. Since these participants are committed to increasing their own literacy in a variety of ways, I wanted to hear their personal theories about themselves in the larger picture of literacy. Lather (1991) reminds that, as teachers and researchers, our work can be "less toward positioning ourselves as masters of truth and justice and more toward creating a space where those directly involved can act and speak on their own behalf" (p. 163-164). In other words, those who are at the core of my study should indeed be participants rather than subjects, co-researchers to a certain extent. Mackall (1997) puts it well when he say, "On a moral compass, all needles point to individual students, the metaphorical north of academia" (p. 75).

Through my facilitation of their interviews, I aimed to create the space where, as Nicolini (1994) suggests, "they [could] interpret, reflect upon, and evaluate where they've been, where they've come from. . . they [could] become aware of and begin to trust their own thinking processes. . . they could explore the self. . . and its relationship to the discourse community beyond it" (p. 60). Actually, there were times during the individual interviews that I found myself theorizing with the participants, sharing my thinking and reading with them and getting their take on t in terms of their own literacy situation.

Stories in this way become the stuff of theory, as it were, particularities from which generalities can come. The stories that I tell and have told myself about these literacy seekers might say more about me than they do about them. It seemed more useful to hear the stories that they tell. As Martone (1997) says, '. . . the stories we tell ourselves create the very space that we . . . inhabit. Place is made by story. . . the true regions of the world we live in are mapped by the stories we tell" (p. 9). My stories describe the regions I live in; to know their regions we must hear their stories.

At the end of each interview, I garnered the participant's permission to follow up later for clarification and elaboration. I also promised them the opportunity to review drafts of my representations of them for their feedback.

I adapted the prompts that I used for the case study interviews from the literature that I have reviewed. (For a complete list of topics and questions, see Appendix A.) From Fingeret and Drennon's (1997) study, with its questions about prior literacy experiences, life at the community college, life outside the college, relationships and social support, and old relationships and new practices, gave me an approach that allowed me to get a somewhat chronological narrative of the participants' literacy lives and to do some before-and-after comparisons. I also kept in mind eliciting information that would relate to Fingeret and Drennon's (1997) spiral model of literacy acquisition: the prolonged tension, the turning point, problem-solving and the seeking of educational opportunities, changing relationships and practices, and intensive continuing interaction (p. 65-67).

Through attention to this spiral model, I hoped to be able to see a comparison between the participants in this study and those at the basic literacy level.

Beyond this general approach, I inserted prompts related to those of the issues raised by my reading of the literature that were of the most interest to me, such as their purposes for literacy, the effects of literacy on their lives, Brandt's "literate know-how", the insider/outsider phenomenon, intrinsic vs. extrinsic motivation, toe role of failure and self-efficacy, metacognitive strategies, and the use of narratives about their own lives as motivation. I also attempted to elicit their perceptions about the role that the community college had played in their journeys so far. Although the prompts used in the interviews were centered around issues raised by the literature, every attempt was made to keep these prompts open-ended enough for participants to share their own takes on their literacy journeys, so that they might reveal new aspects that might be particular to them as a group.

It was interesting to me that by employing a chronological approach to the participants' relationship to literacy, the interview conversations just seemed to take off with little prompting from me. I kept my list of concerns in front of me for reference, but, invariably, most of them came up in the course of each participant's recounting of his or her literacy biography. If they didn't come up directly, narrations of certain incidents often gave me an ordinary conversational opening to focus them more directly on one or more of my concerns. Sometimes, I confess, my attempts at focusing the conversation were not so subtle. Sometimes this more direct and arbitrary raising of questions produced good results, and sometime it didn't. As each interview was winding down, I took a moment to review my list of study issues to make sure that they had all been covered. If they weren't, I simply asked the participants whatever questions were left. Usually there were only one or two, and usually the included issues of metacognition, self-narrative, or reactions to failure.

For the most part, the pilgrims stuck to a clearly chronological order in what they had to say to me, but there were a few exceptions. Indiana, for instance, did flashback to earlier stages of his life from time to time, as did Sid and Ronnie. I did my best to realign these breaks in chronological order when I turned the transcripts into case study chapters. Sid's and Ronnie's interviews were, perhaps, the most difficult to keep on track, but for different reasons. Ronnie had lived a long life with many, many experiences, and it was natural for him to digress into a story here and there that was not clearly connected to what I perceived as the task at hand. Also, for him, schooling was not so central to his literacy biography, and therefore there weren't the handy progressions from elementary school, to high school, to college, to pin the chronology on. My approach with him, consequently, become one of simply steering the conversation always back to the role of reading and writing in his life. I found that I avoided some of the issues that were on my "must cover" list with Ronnie, choosing instead to let him set the tone more. Perhaps this reaction on my part was out of respect for his age, or perhaps it was an assumption on my part that issues of metacognition, self-narrative, and failure as feedback wouldn't make sense to him as he was apart from an academic setting. At any rate, I chose during his interview to just get him to talk about reading and writing in his life and to look between the lines later for these other issues that I was interested in.

Sid, on the other hand, presented unforeseen difficulties for me by the intense emotional reaction that she had as she told her own story. Although I was aware that school had not been easy for her when she was young and that she had suffered a certain measure of ethnic discrimination, I was not prepared for the amount of laughing and crying that we would both do during the interview over these very subjects. She also presented flashbacks from time to time, as more recent incidents reminded her of hurtful ones further in the past. I found myself actually apologizing to her for bringing up such painful memories, but, in the end, I did cover all the bases that I wanted for my study.

After the interviews were conducted, I transcribed them. A friend had given me a transcribing machine, and I was excited about getting the chance to use it. My excitement, however, was short-lived. Although I am a fairly rapid typist, it took me eleven hours to transcribe the first tape! Panic set in. I was working in a very proscribed time frame, and I had not planned on using this many hours for transcribing. What to do? After an initial period of paralysis, which is my reaction to anything that I'm not confident about, I did a problem-solving session in my head and came up with an idea. I would try sitting in an easy chair with my feet up, the tape recorder on one fat arm of the chair, one had on the control buttons, a pad of my favorite legal-sized graph paper in my lap, and an extra-fine-point pen in my other hand and do it the old fashioned way. I had no idea that this would work any better than the transcribing machine had, but, to my delight, it was wonderful. It was much faster for me, and I found the kinesthetic nature of the handwriting process pleasantly engaging. In addition, because I later typed what I had hand-written into the computer, the words of the interviews went through my brain three times: during the interview itself, during my listening to the tape as I wrote by hand,

and during my reading of what I had written as I typed it into the computer. This method might not be as beneficial to everyone, but it sure was to me. (For a sample transcript, see Appendix B).

Once I had a hard copy of each transcript from the computer printer, I took it and marked it up with two goals in mind" to produce an interesting story that would also relate clearly to my research questions. I especially wanted to include as many of the participants' own words as possible, so that the reader could come to know them as they presented themselves. Then I wrote the stories, just as they came from the interviews. Once the stories were written, I took each one and marked it up with code letters for each of the categories from the literature that I had chose, for instance, "A" for acquisition, "CCA" for community college accessibility, and so on. (For a complete list of coding categories, see Appendix C). Then I proceeded to connect each person's story with material from the literature that seemed to apply. On the advice of my dissertation directory, I inserted these pieces of references to the literature right into the text of the story where they related. Some addition codes were added that emerged directly from what the participants were say, rather than from the literature, such as "TB" for the idea of turning back that several participants mentioned, or "GB" for the giving back that almost all of them manifested.

Initially, I had envisioned combing two or three of the pilgrims' stories into one chapter, sensing that there would be commonalties that could be thus connected. But after I had finished interviewing, transcribing and writing, I decided that each pilgrim deserved his or her own chapter. Originally, I was going to entitle each chapter with the pilgrim's pseudonym, but when the time came, I came up with the idea of instead using some of each one's own words as a title, words that would characterize their voices. And finally, on the advice of my dissertation director, I added a paragraph of introduction that would situate each participant in the community college landscape and a sentence or two to characterize the particular contribution that each one made to the study.

I was constantly aware through this process that in any study that depends on the stories of others, and important consideration for the researcher is to practice care and respect for the material so generously provided. To help ensure this care and respect, all representations of the participants' stories were given to them to read and give feedback, a kind of member checking.

My interviews of the seven participants lasted 90 minutes each, totally 10 ½ hours of actual interview time. Upon transcription, these interviews yielded 118 pages of script. Follow up questions were usually handled with phone calls and involved just some minor clarification of factual material. Feedback from the participants on my drafts of their stories came from only three participants. The rest were in agreement with what I represented.

Coles (1989) reminds us that as people bring their stories to us, they can only hope we understand them; when we interpret a story, we are interpreting a life (pp. 1-30). And Brunner (1994) says, "When we include stories gathered from research settings or classroom settings in our texts…, we have an obligation to preserve the dignity of the storyteller" (p. 67). Later she adds, "…it is through the process of crafting the case narrative that the social scientist becomes not simply an objective narrator of experience, but a narrative filter through which experience is shaped and given meaning" (p. 224). This admonition lays a heavy obligation on the researcher, and it helped to understand that detachment is undesirable and impossible; the stories have to, by definition, be shaped by me, with all my identification with my participants' journeys and all my partiality to the community college setting. This study is, in some ways, what Beitler (1997) terms a "heuristic inquiry", using the personal experience of the researcher with a "blatant disregard for detachment" (p. 274). To attempt to counteract my own biases, however, I made a conscious effort to use the participants' exact words as much as possible, so that their voices and experiences could shine through.

CHAPTER IV

"WHY ARE THEY HIDING THESE MESSAGES IN THESE STORIES?"

We can expect to see a fair number of learning disabled students at the community college. According to the disability services coordinator at my school, roughly ten to fifteen percent of the total population has documentation of one or more learning disabilities. If, as she suggests, half of them consider themselves not to be college material, we can still expect seven to ten percent of the population to attempt higher education in spite of their learning disabilities. At my school, that amounts to about 125 new students each year who are documented, and probably an equal number in addition who are not, some of whom may not even be aware that a cognitive dysfunction is the source of their difficulty with academic work. Many people with learning differences choose the community college as the next rung on their educational ladder after public school, because it is near, because it is affordable, and because it seems like a more doable rung than a four-year institution.

I first met Dell three or four years ago when he started coming in for tutoring in writing on a regular basis. Tall and outgoing, he always wore a baseball cap and a smile. He almost always worked with the same professional tutor, and she told me some scraps about him and his learning difficulties. Every chance he got, he told me how much the writing center meant to him. What I saw in him was a young man devoted to improving his own level of literacy at any cost. When I arranged to interview him for this study, however, I was unprepared for the passion with which he would tell his story. His narrative is perhaps the best evidence for the value of the community college's developmental approach to students as a tool for enhancing literacy. He also exemplified a quality of these literacy pilgrims that was not mentioned in the literature, but that, as we will see later, appeared as a factor in almost every pilgrim's story: the instinctive tendency to share what he had gained with others like himself.

Dell is the only child of older parents. His father emigrated from Greece in his twenties, and English is still hard for him, although he owns his own business. Dell's early schooling was a disaster. He was characterized as having "minimal brain dysfunction", and his teachers had no idea how to teach him. He doesn't remember really learning anything. Whenever he disrupted the class with his questions, with his need to understand, or with his restlessness, he was punished by being sent to the principle's office or by being relegated to the hall outside the classroom door. He spent more time out of the classroom than in it. He changed schools often, and described a honeymoon period of a week or two at each new one, and then the same old trouble and treatment.

Dell says that no one listened to him when he tried to explain that he didn't understand things, that is until he was ten or eleven, when teachers understood more about why he was behaving the way he was. But even then, as he explains it, the kinds of programs that would've helped him were too expensive and most schools didn't have them. I asked him what his cognitive difficulties were. He said that with his "adult brain" he believes that his thinking processes lack long-term memory, attention, and the ability to visualize. He thinks that a form of ADD also interferes with his learning.

I asked him what effect this difficult school experience had on his self-esteem. He answered, "They never put it in me from the beginning. Everything they had to say was derogatory and negative." I asked him how he survived. "What I would say to another kid in the same situation is, 'Be quiet. You're not going to learn anything at this point in your life, so just go through it, don't try to fight it, yes-yes everybody, and when you get older you're going to have to go back and learn it.'"

Obviously, Dell wanted to be an insider at his public school, evidenced by the fact that he kept asking questions and trying to understand. But it's just as obvious that he received little or no positive reinforcement for his efforts.

Although Dell entered high school at the average age, it proved to be no better a learning environment for him. "They always put us LD kids in woodshop (how could you screw up sanding a board?), and they envisioned me that I'm great with my hands." He explained that no teacher or counselor in high school ever talked to him about college. "They just said, 'You're good with your hands; maybe you could fix air conditioners.'" But his friends were all going to college, so he thought, "I'd better go, too." When he spoke to the guidance counselor about it in April of his senior year, she said, "Oh, refrigeration is the booming field!" There were three upstate schools with that kind of a program, one of them a community college, and he applied sometime during the summer.

Once again I could see Dell's efforts at fitting in, wanting to move on to college as his friends were doing. The fact that no one in his high school's counseling office had held this possibility out to him only underlines the attitude that he had faced throughout his schooling. Somehow he was "different", but he was wishing not to be. He wanted, and sought, the kind of literacy that would allow him, as Fingeret and Drennon (1997) pointed out, to do things (such as, in this case, attending college) "as other people do them in the same situation" (p. 63). Other people were going to college, and the motivation for him to seek guidance about emulating them is summed up in his words, "I'd better go, too." He seems, at that point, to be echoing Delattre's words: "It is more fun to be an insider than to be excluded" (p.54). I think it's safe to say at this point that the motivation that got Dell to a college campus in the first place was the desire to be an insider.

Dell got accepted at the upstate community college, and when he began to tell me about his arrival there, I had to chuckle. He said, "Yeah, I never saw worse planning in my life." He told of driving around town with his dad, looking for a place to live. He went to the Freshman Seminar and learned about the admissions process and placement testing, things he'd never heard of before. He registered for refrigeration and a basic computer class, and he also had to take remedial math and English. The hands-on part of refrigeration was all right, but when he sat in the lecture hall listening to the theory, he said it felt like being in a room where all the other people spoke and understood a foreign language, like Japanese. He cheated his way through the computer class with the help of another student. The math teacher told him right away that he should leave that class because he had "absolutely no math concepts". The instructor doubted that the school had anything that would accommodate his lack of basic concepts. The LD counselor said there was no hope, he was a lost cause and he should go home. He thought, "I should slit my wrists. My God, what can I do? I'm 200 miles from home. . . ."

I am reminded here of the unpreparedness that many students exhibit when they begin at the community college. They don't understand the system or the rules. They're used to having been closely directed through their high school careers, and they don't realize that they will have to play a larger role and take more initiative in the planning of their community college education. Unlike four-year institutions that admit a select number of students months in advance of their first semester of residence, the community college accepts admission and registration up to, and sometimes for a week after, the first day of classes. This doesn't allow time for mailing out general information about the registration process, the placement testing, the things Dell "had never heard of." Because students arrive thus unprepared for what's expected of them, counselors on site at the beginning of the semester have a huge role to play. In Dell's case, however, even the well-trained and experienced counselors seemed stymied.

Because of Dell's persistence, however, the counselor looked through the catalogue, considered a liberal arts program for Dell, but then remembered that it required math. Finally she came up with a program in Individualized Studies that, according to Dell, "saved my butt. You could choose the courses, anything you wanted, and with enough credits, you could graduate. It gave me a foundation." A wise advisor told him, "Dell, maybe you're bad in math, but you have a shot. Maybe you'll get C's, but maybe you'll learn something." Dell thought to himself, "This degree's for losers, but I really can't do anything else". And to me, in the interview, he said "So this was my only option, and I stayed with it."

In Dell's recounting of the accommodations that were made for him at his first community college, I see evidence of some of the pedagogical perspectives on motivation that I found in the literature. The advisor's comments as reported by Dell, in particular, seem to exemplify Wigg's (1994) conditions for supporting motivation, especially fostering areas of strength (or, in this case, avoiding areas of weakness), adapting curricula, and identifying potential (p. 166). This advisor was straight with Dell in a way that not only made him see his own position realistically but also held out hope for him, exemplifying Pickett's description of community colleges as "colleges that bring hope, opportunity, fulfillment of dreams to a large segment of our population for whom otherwise higher education would be very difficult or impossible" (p. 98). Here also, when Dell says, "This was my only option, and I stayed with it," I began to see his own inner drive start to assert itself, Wlodkowski's (1985) definition of need, "an internal force moving toward a goal" (p. 47). That internal force of Dell's would manifest itself more during our interview. It continues in the next paragraph when he described how he couldn't turn back.

I asked Dell whether he ever felt like just giving up and going home. He answered, "No; I would've gone somewhere else, to a different school. You can't just turn back and forget everything. I'd done things people never do in their life, moved away from home to a place where I knew nobody. . . I had to prove to myself that I was worth something. It didn't really matter at the time what people said; it was what I knew my capabilities were."

I saw two things in this answer of Dell's. First of all, one success (the ability to move away from home on his own) had added to his confidence about what might be possible for him. And second, I saw a new picture of himself emerging in his mind. I view this picture as a beginning of what Kalsner (1992) refers to as self-efficacy or expectation of mastery. Having succeeded at the one endeavor, Dell became willing to entertain the possibility that he might succeed at another. In expressing his own felt knowledge of his capabilities, Dell exhibited the "internal force moving toward a goal" (Wlodkowski, 1985, p. 47) once more. This time the goal is a more defined one, to realize his own potential.

In this Individualized Studies program, Dell was encouraged to take basic courses such as English, psychology, and sociology. He excelled in psychology. He also took other computer applications courses, but he couldn't handle programming because of his lack of math. As he puts it, "I took things that made sense."

I asked him about his English classes at this community college. How was the writing for him? He described it as a good experience. "There were people that helped me. I didn't know about MLA, references, plagiarism. I never heard about them in high school. There they only wanted you to write about what you did on summer vacation." They "bombarded" him with literature classes. He worked with another LD student for whom writing was not a problem, and he read "classical authors". "This wasn't for somebody like me to do", he said. And I asked how it felt to be doing it.

> Dell: I didn't understand why I was doing it. I read stories and didn't get it. Why are they hiding these messages in these stories? Why don't they just say. . . But I realized after that that reading was very important. It taught you to analyze something.
>
> Me: Did you learn to do it?
>
> Dell: I did learn over time, not only to read the stories, but to catch things, the little hints, the hidden pictures. But it takes you a long time and practice to do that. One older woman always got it. And I thought, "How is she able to do that?" But now I'm like her; I'm able to pick up things that others pass by. There are bigger meanings than what the authors are saying.

As Dell described this learning to read between the lines, I identified the experience as a turning point for him. Thinking of Fingeret and Drennon's (1997) spiral model, if we could call all the time of schooling up to this point a period of prolonged tension, then this learning to read analytically could be viewed as a turning point. I was especially touched when he said, "Now I'm like her", not only because it marked a turning point for him, but also because it revealed, once again, his desire to be an insider. In addition to, as Fingeret and Drennon (1997) put it, "doing [tasks] as others do them in the same situation" (p. 63), his statement could be described as what Brandt (1990) might refer to as "context resonance and social solidarity" (p. 194). When he said, "I'm able to pick up things the other pass by", I was reminded of Wlodkowski's (1985) notion of competence as a source for motivation.

When Dell talked about learning to do this kind of analysis, I tried to lead him a little bit by asking him whether this learning allowed him to do other things. He answered as follows: "You want me to say that English has changed my life. English is an integral part of my life. Has it changed it? I would say no, not by itself. Nor math, nor science. They each bring an aspect to the table. Math makes you think in a concrete way; English makes you think in a creative way. In English there is no right answer because the writing keeps progressing and changing over time." This was Dell at this time reflecting on his own learning and what it has been for him. Dell was very honest in his expressed understanding of what his academic learning meant for him. He refused to give me the answer that he perceived I wanted, and instead gave me a much more complex one, that English (reading and writing) provided one part of his learning, but math and science provided others. This understanding of his betrayed not only metacognitive activity on his part (Paris & Parecki, 1993), but also an understanding of himself and where his path was leading.

Getting mostly B's and C's, Dell completed the degree. "That LD counselor had to eat her words. To this day she doesn't know how I've done what I've done". After graduating, he came home and realized right away that he couldn't do anything with the degree, and that he was "right back where I started." A neighbor of his was enrolled in an occupational therapy program and suggested that it might suit him because of his interest in psychology. At that point, having lived on his own and having learned certain economic realities about paying bills, he was anxious to become economically independent. His parents were getting older, and his dad was not in the best of health. Although he really wanted to tackle a four-year degree, he knew that because of finances, his own capabilities, and his lack of mental preparedness, this was not the time to try that. So a two-year degree in occupational therapy had a great appeal.

We might say that Dell's motivation changed at this point, from wanting to be like other people to wanting to support himself economically. To my mind, however, it also exemplified a new kind of Brandt's "literate know-how" (p. 194) that he had gained at the community college. Before that experience, he was relatively unaware of the economic concerns of everyday life. Living on his own while he pursued his education had taught him about more than just reading and writing. Although his father had given him the money to pay his bills, he had to physically do it himself and thus learned about what things cost. This knowledge was added to the academic learning for him.

Dell took a year off from school and did research. "I did my homework; I asked other students." He visited five different schools with the program he was interested in.

At one school, when he was asking for information, an admissions officer wouldn't tell him anything without an application fee. He said to her, "But ma'am, I'm not even sure that this is a place I need to be." I mentioned at this point in his story that I was struck by the comparison to the way he chose his first school. He agreed that is was "night and day". He went on to say, "That other community college gave me valuable tools. . . [it] gave me a foundation and expectations on which to base choices."

It was obvious to me at that point that it was second nature for him to take these tools, this foundation, and transfer them to another setting. Once again I saw him employing a kind of "literate know-how", transferring knowledge gained in one setting to another situation, and in this case using it to plan for his future. I mentioned in Chapter Two that I view one of the most valuable practices of the community college as its treating students in a developmental way, teaching, guiding, encouraging them to grow in their understanding of and relationship to the world around them. When Dell said that his community college gave him "expectations on which to build choices", I think he was reflecting the self-development that happened to him at the community college. Dell gave me a glimpse here, too, of how the effects of increased literacy were showing up in his approach to situations, especially those effects described by Lytle & Wolf (1989) as "increased self esteem and self determination" (p. 66).

Dell arrived at my school for an interview with the disabilities counselor. Even with an associate's degree in hand, he was told by this counselor, "I don't think this is the place for you. . . I don't think you can do it. I don't think you should bother coming here. These grades. . . this school requires math and science. I don't think you can hack it." Dell reported thinking, "Oh, here we go again." But his father was with him at this interview, and at this point he said to Dell, "You know, after you completed the first college, you demonstrated to me that, without a doubt, when you put your mind to something, you're capable to do anything you want." And to the counselor the father said, "I know my son; I'm not talking out of ego; he went with nothing and came back with a college degree. Give him a chance." Although she was still trying to discourage him, she couldn't turn him away because of our open-enrollment policy. In May he will graduate once more, this time with two-year degrees in occupational therapy and elementary education.

Although not too much was mentioned in the literature about the role of family support in moving forward with literacy, I saw this role at several points during my interviews with participants. I assumed that by the time he heard these discouraging words at my school, his confidence and self-esteem were healthy enough that he would have prevailed all by himself, but he found it significant to tell me about the part that his father had played in his behalf, so I have to believe that it was, indeed, significant at this point in his willingness to persist.

I asked Dell what he plans for his next step. He said he eventually wants the four-year degree. He thinks he could get accepted in a program now because his grades here have been good. But instead he wants first to go back to a local GED program. I was surprised at this and asked him why. He said, "Maybe I am an OT, maybe I do have college on some levels, but just because you have the roof doesn't mean that you have the other two-by-fours that are holding up the roof. I need the other parts that I know I'm missing. I have to learn the reasons why. I want to do math without a calculator, and write without a grammar checker. . . . Without those pieces, I don't believe I'm going to be able to link higher levels of information. If I could go back to elementary school, I would." He explained that he realized that in the GED program he would be in classes with people who were perhaps quite illiterate, and people who were recent immigrants. But he said this would not bother him at all. "I will just take a step down with my ego, go there and say, "You know what? I'm not better than anybody just because I have a college degree. We're all at the same level, and we're all here because we need help." He tried to make me understand that it is not a good feeling not to understand certain things, and how this lack of understanding created limitations for him. To bring this point home he said, "There'd be some LD people angry or ashamed to compare themselves to the illiterate. I can definitely compare myself to the illiterate. I can understand one hundred per cent what they go through. My father can't understand English well; I grew up with many people who were illiterate. I don't understand how I became as good as I became in some areas. I just know it happened."

I thought of Paris and Parecki's (1993) discussion of metacognition as Dell told me this plan. He obviously thinks often and seriously about his own abilities and his own learning process, and this would support Paris and Parecki's notion that metacognition contributes greatly to motivation because it "entails reflection directed at orchestrating one's own behavior and thinking" (p. 7). Obviously, Dell's plan for his future had come out of some very serious reflection of this sort.

Added to this evidence of metacognition, I saw here also a level of self esteem and self confidence (Lytle & Wolf, 1989) that would allow him to "take a step down with my ego" in order to pursue the needed pieces that he had determined for himself as necessary. His clear purpose for increased literacy, that it would make him able to "link higher levels of information", reflected Stein's (1995) idea of literacy as access or a bridge to the future. Here, too, Dell is showing a kind of problem-solving sense that is borne out of self-knowledge (Chaplin, 1993). He realizes what he's lacking and plans a concrete action to fill the gap.

I suggested at this point that there were tools missing that Dell wanted. He answered, "There are a lot of tools. So I gotta go to Sears, and I gotta buy them, bit by bit." I wondered out loud whether he felt like some kind of a fake because of the missing pieces, but he was emphatic in his answer. " Definitely not a fake. I think a fake would not admit his weakness. . . The knowledge I demonstrate now I have. . . [but] I don't pretend about the things I don't know. I've taken the beating, and I know where I belong." He explained that at his first college, he had had to work really hard, but at this school he felt that he "just sat back and coasted down the hill". I suggested that maybe he learned how to learn at the other school, and that he learned things about himself. But he replied that he didn't feel particularly challenged here, and that "One hundred percent I want the challenge. I believe I'm on my way, and I believe that knowing it for yourself, that's the biggest thing."

Dell's sense of himself, of his own strengths and weaknesses, and his own ability to rise to challenges were all evident here. His clarity about what he knows and what he doesn't, and especially his willingness to assert both, gave me a strong picture of one whose increased literacy/knowledge/power had given him a strong sense of self esteem and self determination (Lytle & Wolf, 1989) and a clear mastery orientation (Kalsner, 1992) that would lead him on to the next challenge.

I wasn't sure what he meant by "knowing it". He explained, "Knowing you can do it, and having self confidence because I realize now that it doesn't matter what anyone else says to you, or what they're looking at, or what grades; that's meaningless. But if you really believe in yourself and you know you can do it, there's nothing that can stand in your way. That woman who told me I couldn't make it in this school asked me yesterday if she'd see me at graduation, and I said, 'You bet you're going to see me.'" Here again, Dell's self esteem and self-confidence are evident, a sense that his own judgment and assessment of himself are more important that the evaluation the others, like the LD specialist, put on him. He had proved her wrong in this educational experience, and it was clear that he fully intended to prove other detractors and naysayers wrong in the future.

I asked him what he would do at his future four-year institution if he came upon a situation that was too hard for him. He answered, "First of all, I'm a verbal person, and I'm going to let somebody know I can't do it. At first I'll panic and go to the teacher and say, 'Look, what are your office hours?' If that doesn't work, the next thing is you ask a fellow student to help you. . . You have to do whatever you need to do. Any college student has to do that. Part of it is when there is a problem, knowing what your options are, knowing how to deal, because you're not always going to have the answer to the problem. . . You have to, in college, know yourself and learn what resources you have."

Dell's problem-solving strategies are most clear in these statements of his. He has learned "what the options are", "how to deal". I felt at this point that his problem-solving strategies had arisen not only out of knowledge of himself, but out of difficulties or failures that he'd had before (Kalsner,1992; Cavaliere, 1997) and the ways he had found to overcome them. Now he viewed himself as somewhat of an expert in the problem-solving department, to the point that he was not afraid to say, “you’re not always going to have the answer to the problem”. Even though the answer is not always in your possession, he seemed to say, there are many ways of seeking help to find it.

At one point Dell told me that he had cheated, and that he believes that the system forces every college student to cheat at one time or another. I asked him to describe his cheating. He referred to a time early in a semester in an occupational therapy class. The students were assigned to write a treatment plan without having been taught how to do it. In fact, he said, they were not shown how until the very last week of that semester. He tried first to find out how to do it in several libraries, but he came up empty. He asked other students in the class, but they didn’t know how either. So he found a student from the year before and borrowed her answer to the assignment. He used it for a model.

What Dell terms “cheating” here, I would describe as a very creative approach to problem solving. When his usual strategies (the library, other students in the class) didn’t provide what he needed in order to succeed, he sought out a model from a student who had been successful at the task. Many of us as teachers provide just such models for our assignments and refer to them as pedagogical tools.

Dell said at one point, “School has taught me to use the library, to use resources. If I’m driving, and I get lost somewhere, I go to the library and pick up a local map.” I got the sense here that he values and has internalized the “foundation” he was given at his first community college, that never having known some things before that, he now treasures them and utilizes them to help him crack the code of everyday life, a transfer of skills that Brandt (1990) would term “literate know how”. And later he referred to the writing center as an asset. "This place has bailed me out of many problems. Niceness, being good to people, is important."

As our interview wound to a close, I told him that I had sensed from earlier conversations with him that his ultimate goal was to speak truth to power, as it were, to stand on a par with those who had made his early schooling so miserable and point out the error of their ways. He answered, "I think I have the power to do that now." He described how the disabilities counselor invited him to speak with other LD students. This mentoring came naturally to him, as he had done it over the years with neighborhood kids, telling them to do "A, B and C in order to get to D. I have lived with this problem all my life," he said. "It's like an alcoholic talking to other alcoholics."

I realized as Dell was telling me about his mentoring of other, younger, LD students, that a facet of most of my participants might be this tendency to give back that which they had gained themselves. It certainly was clear here in Dell's story, and as the other pilgrims' stories unfold, we will see evidence of it there, too. It's tempting to identify this practice as one of Lytle & Wolf's (1989) aspects of the effects of literacy, "participating in the community" (p. 66), but I think it has a different quality than just participating as a member. Mentoring such as this implies a leadership quality that goes above and beyond mere participation. And it tends, in many of the participants, to relate to the very issue that they themselves initially found difficulty with.

Soon the counselor had him speaking on panels of professionals in the field, but when he challenged others on these panels about their ideas and practices, the counselor "got heat." He doesn't do it any more. He said of that experience, "I am now a clinician, and they can't fight one of their own. Knowledge is power, and I like it. . . I know all I need to know to knock them out of the water, but until I have more credentials, they won't listen.".

Not only do we get the clear sense here that Dell understands completely the connection between knowledge and power, but he has a clear picture of his relationship to the discourse community that he wants to be a part of. Although he feels that he has enough knowledge (not only academic knowledge, but also a large amount of hard-won experiential knowledge) to, as he puts it, "knock them out of the water", he realizes that members of that community can ignore him and destroy his credibility until he gains enough credentials. I sensed that he won't give up his quest for these credentials until he has enough of them to take his place and use his voice to make life better for children and young people who face the same obstacles that once plagued him. Credentials is an issue that will surface again in the pilgrims' stories.

There are several issues I would like to raise and/or summarize before leaving this depiction of Dell's situation. First of all, I was struck by his avoidance of the notion of failure. I gave him many opportunities to discuss failure and what it might mean to him, but it was as if there was no such word in his vocabulary. Failure and talk of it seemed to have been replaced, for him, with the notion of creative problem solving (Kalsner, 1992; Cavaliere, 1997). There is no room on his path for naysayers or those who would discourage him, and there is no assignment or task too difficult for him to figure out a way to handle. Negativity has been totally replaced by a positive and constructive attitude.

In my thinking, there are five ideas from the literature that are the most important for me to apply to each participant: 1) how well do they adhere to Richardson, Okun &

Fisk's (1983) definition of literacy; 2) whether they exhibit any or all of the stages of Fingeret and Drennon's (1997) spiral model for literacy acquisition; 3) to what purposes they apply their increasing literacy; 4) whether their motivation is intrinsic (for the sake of learning and knowledge), extrinsic (for economic purposes), or for purposes of fitting in; and 5) what role the community college played in their literacy pilgrimage.

Clearly, Dell is an example of a pragmatic literacy learner who will generally use his growing literacy skill as "operations in service of a goal within a given context" (Richardson, Okun, & Fisk, 1983, p. 4). For him, so far, the context has been largely academic, but it has also extended to making his way successfully through successive institutions and to using libraries for problem solving in everyday life. As he moves further into his chosen field, I have no doubt that he will have no problem adapting his higher-level reading and writing skills to contexts beyond academia.

If we look at Fingeret and Drennon's (1997) spiral model, we can see that Dell exemplifies all five aspects of it. I would name his entire career in public schools as the period of prolonged tension; the developmental experience that he had in his first community college as the turning point; his problem solving and seeking educational opportunities as most evident when he began his search for a school with an occupational therapy program and the time since; his changing relationships and practices as the refinement of his problem solving and metacognitive strategies; and his intensive continuing interaction as his careful, thoughtful, and serious planning for his academic future.

The question of Dell's purpose, if we refer back to Fingeret & Drennon (1997), is clearly a desire to change his life, to no longer be the public school student who had no control over his own learning, was never informed about college, and was characterized as being "good with his hands." It is obvious that the change in his life that Dell envisioned for himself entailed being competent, educated, and good with his brain. If we look at Stein's (1995) notion of purposes for literacy, we can see Dell employing it for access (into the discourse community of his choice), for a voice (in his own education and also in that discourse community that he seeks access to), as a source of independence (both in an economic sense and in the sense of finding the information that he needs), and as a bridge to the future, living life equal to the potential that he sees in himself.

As far as motivation goes, initially we can see it as that of fitting in, wanting to go to college to be like his friends. But now the motivation that Dell openly owns up to is extrinsic, that of economics, being self-supporting. And yet, behind his words I detected a certain joy he feels at being able to do things academically that were once denied him. There is also his notion that "Knowledge is power, and I like it". So it appears that motivation may not be an either/or situation for Dell, and perhaps not for any of my pilgrims, but rather a complex combination of factors that change and move over time.

The community college has played an important role all the way in Dell's literacy journey. First of all, if he had not been enrolled in the community college, chances are there would have been no higher education in his life at all. Given his high school history, chances are good that it was only because of the open door that he found a place for himself. In addition, the willingness of his first community college to work with him and find a curriculum that would play to his strengths and avoid his weaknesses allowed him the opportunity to succeed in the higher education setting. While he was there, his literacy was furthered in a very developmental way that he was able to absorb. This developmental approach, gave him a “foundation” and “expectations upon which to base choices”, both of which have stood him in good stead as he progressed to his second community college experience. Although I have previously revealed my own partiality toward community colleges, especially for some students, I believe that were it not for the existence of the community college, there might be no literacy story to tell about Dell.

There were two issues that emerged from Dell’s story that were not clearly defined in the literature. One was the practice of giving back what he has learned through his struggles to those experiencing the same struggles. And the other is the tendency to maintain a positive and constructive stance toward the future and the difficulties it may present. These are two issues that I will look for as I examine the other pilgrims’ stories.

CHAPTER V

"I'M SICK OF YESSING."

Not all students at the community college who experience learning difficulties make their difficulties known or allow themselves to be documented. Some estimate that perhaps twice as many prefer to keep their learning disabilities unknown as those who declare them openly. Many of these undeclared learning disabled students experience great difficulties in their academic work, particularly in reading and writing, and probably a large number just give up. Having been able to avoid heavy reading and writing tasks through out their public school career by immersing themselves in endeavors that require other kinds of knowledge and skills, some find the degree requirements of a community college too daunting, and rather than deal with the issue of language difficulties, they simply go away. But others teach themselves new strategies for dealing with the skills that give them trouble and not only survive, but also thrive in the community college. James is one such student.

Dell showed us the role of the community college in developing a person's metacognitive skills, but James taught himself these skills and has raised them to an art form. In addition, he was very loud and clear about the fact that his motivation in seeking higher literacy is that of a desire to change his life.

James showed up for last fall's tutor training session which I held just before the semester began. Since the invitations for this training go out only to students in the honors program at my school, I naturally assumed that he was one. As the semester began, I monitored the tutoring sessions of each of the new tutors and discovered that James had a real gift. He was able to get totally into the shoes of the person that he was tutoring and create terrific rapport in a very short time. He was patient, and he was able to couch his comments in several ways to make sure that the client understood what he meant. I was very impressed, so impressed, in fact, that I made it a point to commend him to the head of the honors program. “James?”, he said, “I don’t recall an honors student by that name.” He checked his files and found, sure enough, that James was not enrolled in the honors program. When I mentioned this to James, I said, “First of all, there’s no way I’m going to fire you because you’re too good. But how did you find your way to the training session?” He explained that another teacher had suggested to him that he might be a good tutor, so he asked some other students who had been invited and just came along with them.

As I talked with James, I began to see that one of the reasons he was such a good tutor was that he had been through many difficulties with reading and writing himself. He told me enough about his previous experiences that I invited him to participate in my study.

As it turned out, James had had a positive experience with reading and writing during his early years. His mother read to him, and he remembers that she had begun to teach him to read before he went to school. First grade was fine for him. “I don’t remember any struggles with reading and writing. I had trouble learning to tie my shoes, but not with reading and writing. I was able to read to people, and the learning just happened after practice.” It seems that the trouble began when his family moved, and he registered in a new school for second grade. There he was given the Iowa test, and suddenly he found himself in a class with slow learners, “a group that worked weeks behind, and not in any detail.” He became self-conscious about his reading and writing for the first time, and he stayed that way through high school. "By the time I got to high school, I was really into music, so I didn't pay much attention. I thought I couldn't do it anyway, so I chose something where I felt comfortable and almost safe, not ashamed, not embarrassed."

Faced with feeling inadequate and unsuccessful in the academic areas of public school, James chose to expend his energy in an area where he was competent, music, where he could feel "comfortable, almost safe, not ashamed, not embarrassed." Fingeret and Drennon (1997) or Delattre (1983) might term this choice of James' as an insider/outsider phenomenon. James was an outsider, or felt himself so, in academic classes, but he could be an insider in music classes. Since he was obviously experiencing no pedagogical interventions, such as Wigg (1994) describes, that might have motivated him toward academics, he avoided that area and chose one that made him feel like a successful insider.

After high school, James attended a prestigious music conservatory. Although along with the music courses he was required to take a rigorous program of academic courses, he felt that nothing outside the music department really mattered. He didn't do very well in the academic courses, got D's in some of them, but it turned out not to matter because he didn't stay there to graduate. As he put it, "I found out that music was not the true way for me. . . I think wanting so bad to find something that worked for me. . . I was more stubborn. I had enough of spending my life searching, trying to do something with my feelings, so even if I was scared, I felt I should be able to do this [attend the community college]. Even though I hadn't done well in academics, I saw how to apply myself."

The turning point toward increasing his own literacy came for James at the conservatory, where music turned out not to be the avenue of expression that he had hoped for. Here we can see Wlodkowski's (1985) notion of the "internal force" (p. 47) moving in James. He wanted something for himself that music was not providing, and this inner drive propelled him toward that at which he had up until then he had been unsuccessful. We can also see here the beginning of James' use of self-narrative as a motivating tool, as Kashima (1997) suggests sometimes happens.

James explained that although music and academics are different, he had learned how to study through music courses and practice. "It's the same kind of function: you practice, don't try to memorize, but practice whatever you're learning, and apply it, and try to understand it and relate it to other things." He added that living on his own in the city had showed him that he had "something inside me that said I could survive."

James talked more about this transfer of skills later, but it really struck me the first time he alluded to it here—he was so rational and sensible and clear about it. It seemed to embody Brandt's (1990) idea of literate know how at a point where literacy for James was quite shaky. At the same time, I was reminded of Kalsner's (1992) notion of a mastery orientation when he described having "something inside me that said I could survive." This understanding that James expressed seemed to me to be the beginning of a kind of mastery thinking.

So James came to the community college, hoping to find a new way to express himself, and knowing that he would have no escape from the dreaded "academics". I asked him how his first semester at my school was for him. He took math skills, which didn't scare him because he knew it would be pretty much review. But he also took psychology, a multicultural course, and English, which he entered with some trepidation. As he put it, “I was used to not succeeding in the academic courses at the conservatory, but at least I was used to the college environment. I was used to hearing and being assigned things, that you have to write a paper, you have to do this. I realized that having done something that I didn’t think was academic [music] and being able to accomplish it, that academics are the same thing in a universal way, maybe not at the detail level.”

Here we see James taking one understanding (“at least I was used to the college environment”) and applying it to his new situation to keep himself going. It almost seemed as if Brandt’s (1990) literate know how was being put to a motivational purpose.

So James proceeded to apply what he had learned about being successful in his music courses to the task in front of him in academic courses. I asked him how much of a factor his parents’ support had been. He said he believes that his parents gave him a lot of support; they encouraged him to try to take some Regents’ classes in high school even when guidance counselors were afraid to let him do it. He explained,” Their support helped me to continue, but it felt good only in the short term. My insecurities were still there.” So I asked him where the drive to forge ahead came from.

“Well, it’s all my drive, one hundred per cent. My parents are always there to support me, but they always tell me that they don’t care what I do as long as it’s what I want to do. I don’t know if it’s out of fear and almost being sick of existing kind of like I can’t do this, but, hey, I want to do academics and even if people say I can’t, I’m sick of yessing. I feel like even if I fail, I have to do it. Being told I can’t do this so I have to choose this for a secondary thing: I don’t like that.” When I asked James whether being told he can’t do something makes him want to do it more, his answer showed me his unwillingness to be defined by someone else's limits being put on him. "You live like that your whole life, and it does emotional damage and it ruins you in certain ways, and you feel that you don't belong to anything. If I think I can express myself through literature, but I can't read, then I can't do it. I don't like having limits. Because everyone else is reading. It's the same way I felt about tying my shoes, same type of let-down. Everyone else my age was tying their shoes, but I couldn't. I felt like maybe there was something wrong with me, and after a while you get sick of that. From my experiences in my previous college, I learned that I could do things that I didn't think I could, or I could at least survive."

Once again I saw Wlodkoski's (1985) "internal force" (p. 47) at work in James' frustration with the limits put on him by his reading and writing difficulties. When he talked about being "sick of yessing", I was reminded of Dell's advice to young students in the same boat, that there's really no choice at that point but to "yes". When James talked about "everyone else" being able to do things that he couldn't, when he said, "you feel that you don't belong to anything'" and' "maybe there was something wrong with me", I saw a yearning that exemplified the insider/outsider phenomenon described by Fingeret & Drennon (1997) and Delattre (1983). And once again, when James drew the comparison between reading and tying his shoes, I saw the self-narrative of Kashima (1997) at work. The strongest motivation that I saw here, however, was James being fed up with the way things were for him, which evidenced a clear desire to change his life (Fingeret & Drennon, 1997).

Thinking of Dell and his ability to use his verbal skills, I asked James whether he had compensated with the use of verbal skills. He explained that he was really quite shy during his public school years, mostly because he felt different, so he didn't really try to socialize there. It wasn't until late high school, when he was feeling really competent in his music, that he began to realize that other people had insecurities just like his, only in different areas. Reading and writing were the hard things for him, but others had insecurities about doing music, which came easy for him. Before that, he says, "I think I understood other people in a distorted way, thinking that I'm like this myself [scared], but they're not like that because they're better than me. Then I saw that everybody had some insecurity; even though I still felt frightened about academics and still felt that I couldn't do things, at least I knew that I wasn't different from other people." Although James described this step in his transformation as understanding others in a less distorted way, it seemed to me that this change led ultimately to more knowledge of himself and his place in the world.

James went on to explain, however, that during his first few weeks at the community college, he lost that confidence. He had what felt like panic attacks. He felt paranoid, like people were watching him, and it was like high school all over again. "I came home the first day and felt sick. My parents said, 'How was it?', and I knew I hated it, and I couldn't say it." But obviously, he had persisted. I asked what made him keep coming. "It was almost like I couldn't stop now. Not that I had to fit in, but there was something in me that really wanted to come out and experience life at it's most tender point, it's most flavorful point, and I knew that if I didn't go through this and try to find what was right for me, I would end up doing something I hated. I'm not trying to put down people without college educations, but I knew I didn't want to live the kind of life that my father does, not graduating college and just working a job that he hates." He went on to explain that he had worked summer jobs in retail and the food business, and he knew that if he didn't work through the problems of going to college, he would end up back there. "I knew I didn't want that because I felt like that was walking away from the true things in life. . . I want every second that I'm alive to be doing something I want."

Once again in these statements of James', Wlodkowski's (1985) "internal force" (p. 47) manifested itself clearly, as does Fingeret & Drennon's (1997) idea that the chief purpose of literacy is to change one's life. There was a real now-or-never tone in James' voice when he made these statements.

At this point I mentioned to James that there are theories that obstacles actually give adult learners momentum. He said that it didn't feel like momentum to him at the beginning. He said, "When you first start off, you still feel like you're empty, or you feel like you don't have hope, but in a sense you've got nothing to lose. You feel at the bottom where it doesn't matter any more. You've had enough. You think, 'I know what the problem is, and I'm sick of it.' It's more just something you have to do." He tried to explain at that point that you have to get away from the unconscious reaction, "I'm dumb; I'm stupid; I can't do this", become aware of the reasons for the fear and discouragement and move into problem-solving mode.

James' thinking about failure impressed me because he was doing what Kalsner (1992) and Cavaliere (1997) suggest, turning failure or inability into problem solving. He did this through increasing his own self-knowledge (Chaplin, 1993). James presented the notion that when a person hits bottom, gets thoroughly sick of the status quo, he has no choice but to find different ways to look at the problem. In other words, he must seek to change his life (Fingeret & Drennon, 1997).

James has been successful at the community college, and I asked him whether his success surprised him and his parents. He answered, "Yeah. They didn't tell me then, but they tell me now that they were really nervous for me." I asked him how long it took him to realize that he'd be okay here. He said, "Probably a good month. I didn't know how to do it. I had to really test myself because I didn't know what kind of a learner I was. Was I better reading ahead or the night before? But after a couple of weeks and a couple of tests and a couple of papers, it happened quickly. I learned what's best for me as far as time and pacing and writing and revisions and note taking. The only reason I think it happened quick for me is that I applied everything I learned from music. If people close off academics like it's not like anything else, they might feel 'I can't do it", but it's a process, like practicing an instrument. You find what ways, what techniques are best for you and then you ride on that. That's what helped me."

James' metacognitive strategies were clear here. He deliberately started thinking about his own thinking and learning about his own learning in order to get out of the dilemma that he found himself in. And when he said, "I applied everything I learned from music", Brandt's (1990) literate know how was evident.

Having listened to this tale of James' struggle to become academically competent, I realized what a huge decision it had been for him to become an English major. I asked him how that decision happened. About academics in general, James had this to say: "Even though I hated with a passion reading and writing and academics, just didn't like it, just didn't like how it felt, I'd always known that I liked thinking about things. I always liked analyzing things just for fun. I just never realized that that was a function of academics. I thought academics was memorizing things. I was never tested on the why and the how of thinking, more just memorizing, spelling, definitions." And about English in particular, he explained that at the conservatory, his main occupation was composing: that's what he wanted to do. Although this composing was always discussed in musical terms, to him there was always a story behind it, an experience. "But", he said, "when people listened to it, they never got it. I was terribly hurt." It became clear to him that he would never get what he wanted out of music. "The things I was requiring out of the music composition couldn't be done, no matter how well I did it. Even Brahms and Beethoven didn't get what I wanted to get. I didn't get my story out."

So now I was able to see that ultimately what James wanted from literacy was Stein's (1995) notion of voice. The disappointment he experienced in music was evident when he said, "I didn't get my story out." The sharing of his story was of paramount importance to him. Here, too, James reiterated what he had said before about abandoning music, which led me to label this occurrence as his turning point (Fingeret & Drennon, 1997). So even the music, which had made him feel safe in high school, turned out to be a part of the prolonged tension (Fingeret & Drennon, 1997) he had experienced. The very fact that he noticed this disappointment and was able to articulate it so clearly exhibited a high level of metacognition (Paris & Parecki, 1993) on his part.

When James started studying literature, he realized that it could be described in terms that he was familiar with."There's meter there, alliteration, assonance, technique. Wait! There's a story in this. All of a sudden it just hit me—that's what I was trying to do. That's why I was unhappy. Throughout my life I had been trying to do literature through different things. Before music I was going to be an art major." I suggested that maybe the basis for his need to get his story out is a desire to connect with people.

"Maybe it's total selfishness", he said, "or maybe it's comfort for me, maybe connecting makes me feel safe." He explained that he's always enjoyed his alone time, but he likes the understanding that "there's something about people that everybody shares with each other, and it just comes out in different forms. Everybody's scared; everybody has insecurities; it just comes out in different forms."

The turning point was reinforced for James when he began studying literature. It was a real discovery moment for him when he realized, "Throughout my life I'd been trying to do literature through different things." Literate know how is almost too small a term to define this large picture that was emerging for James—he was relating different kinds of knowledge and practice to each other in a very sophisticated way.

At this point in the interview, I invited James to join me in theorizing about what makes some people exceptional in their pursuit of literacy in spite of obstacles. His take on the phenomenon was as follows: "I know it's impossible to have one hundred percent success. I know that people fail and revert back to former ways. But I think underlining all those people to do it is realizing the truth of the situation, consciously realizing, 'I should be able to read; I want to read; I'm not different from anybody else; it might be harder for me; I'm just a human being', and living, because they're so sick of being what they are. Staying where they are would mean submitting to limits, but learning the truth, consciously being aware of who you really are as much as you can be, forces you to automatically do it. Socrates said, when man knows the good he must do the good. Not just intellectually know it, but emotionally know, 'Hey, I do have a problem, but I'm no different than anybody else.'"

James has plenty to say on this topic of doing whatever is necessary to fully develop oneself. "I want to do this because if I don't, I'm going to be like I am right now, and I don't want to be like that anymore. . . You have to be honest with yourself no matter how painful it is, and I guess you have to feel ready to be willing not to want to be like that any more."

If I had needed a clearer statement from James that his main purpose in transcending the literacy limits that had been placed on him was a desire to change his life (Fingeret & Drennon, 1997), this was certainly it. He has learned that problem solving can move him from the dreaded fate of being "like I am right now" to a better place. Although he can see that the challenge of doing something that "might be harder for me" could be too much for some people, and he understands and accepts that for them, he cannot accept it for himself. "I don't want to be like that any more", he said.

We talked for a while about the price to be paid for taking the risk, and the price to be paid for not taking it. James thinks there's always a price, but the price doesn't have to be a bad thing. "It's just whether you want to bleed for something that'll make you feel better, or for not doing things. You might have to suffer just the initial nervousness, or feeling silly, or even revisiting your old fears. You can't avoid being emotionally scarred."

I asked him whether his new position vis-a-vis academics has changed his relationships with old friends. He said, "Oh, yeah, they see me differently now. They were pretty much surprised, not that they doubted me. They pretty much saw me as, 'He seems smart, but he can't do that', or 'He doesn't understand that.' It's made me feel more confident, even if I come up with a problem that's not academic; it's made me feel more able to tackle something. I've practiced more, so it doesn't seem as traumatic. I realize that you get through it one way or another. You might not succeed, but as long as you try."

So, although he always felt accepted by his friends, he realizes that they see him differently now. He also realizes that the confidence he has gained through literacy has enabled him to practice problem solving in areas that are "not academic". Coupling these two phenomena together as he did in the interview led me to see in them another piece of Fingeret and Drennon's (1997)spiral model—what they call changing relationships and practices. The effect of increased self-confidence that James experienced as his literacy increased (Lytle & Wolf, 1989) led to a difference in how he experiences relationships and everyday competence.

When I wanted to know how he had handled things at the community college when he didn't succeed, he echoed what he had said before about not liking the place at first. "After the first week, I declared to myself , 'This is my first semester here and my last semester; I hate it." But after the first semester he asked himself, "What good is it going to do if I go somewhere else? Nothing's ever perfect. Leaving's not going to solve it. . . Just take it in steps, realizing the problem and dealing with that first, not trying to get the whole thing. And then say, 'Now how do I feel? Is anything different?' It's a pain, but it's just always monitoring yourself, monitoring the things around you. If you get so concerned about succeeding and get really stressed out, you have to realize that you're doing something about it, and realize that if you do fail, it's better than not doing anything. It's more about the act."

Here James read like a text book chapter on the use of metacognition as a problem solving tool. I got the feeling that he had become a really good coach for himself, reminding himself of helpful strategies, calming himself in the face of stress over succeeding, making allowances for himself ("Nothing's ever perfect"), and generally, as he put it, monitoring himself every step of the way.

James described a few things that he did badly on, essay tests and some other assignments that required reading and writing. About the essay tests he said, "I still have to practice that," and about the others he said, "I just had to develop myself in writing and reading. I would get down on myself, and then I'd say, 'You know what? I spent my time not reading, so what do I expect?'" I asked him how reading is for him now, whether he enjoys it. He answered, "Yeah. I don't know if I'm just making up for lost time, but before I just found it hard to understand what was going on on the page. I couldn't put a paragraph together. They were all just individual words. I think I'm one of the real lucky ones, because something happened really fast. The more I read, all of a sudden it became, not easier, but I could understand."

James can call himself lucky if he wants to, but I had the feeling listening to him that more than luck was at work. First of all, he had taken the challenge, faced the fact that he wanted to change, and that it wouldn't be easy. Then he had followed up with metacognitive strategies and problem solving strategies to achieve his ends. And finally, he constantly monitored his own progress in the light of these strategies. I would call this way more than luck.

Transparently, I'm afraid, I asked James whether he tells his own story to himself to keep him going. "Whenever I get stressed," he says, "what will I be doing next year, what will I be doing in five years, I say to myself, 'Look what happened three years ago, four years ago,' putting things in perspective. Calling on my past and saying, 'How did you feel about it then, but how do you feel about it now?' That helps me understand stuff that's coming and relax. It's a constant process. Once you see the truth, it's not that you learn it once and that's it. Truth changes and grows. It's made up of experiences lumped together; you rediscover it."

So, even though my prompt was rather pointed, it did get the result I wanted and expected at this point in the interview. James does, indeed, use self-narrative for the purposes that Kashima(1997) describes: to "encode, aid recall, help regulate affect, and facilitate problem solving" (p. 22). I could see all these uses in what James had told me so far, but particularly the latter two. He uses his own story to keep his spirits up when they might have reason to flag and to help him figure out the reasons for any discomfort or discouragement, so that he can do something about them.

As with Dell, I needed clarification of James' notion of "truth". He explained, "It's truth about you and about others, of the whole situation. You eliminate the irrational feeling. Instead of ,'I'm stupid because I can't read', you say, 'What are the real reasons I can't read?' It has to do with reality, the realization of what things really are. . . Negatives are learning tools. Negative stuff affects you more. Negatives mold you."

His comments about negatives were interesting to me. Whereas Dell had seemingly sought to eliminate negatives from his thinking, replacing them with a can-do, mastery orientation (Kalsner, 1992), James saw the negatives as having a constructive impact on his progress. He was probably wise in saying, "Negative stuff affects you more", wise and realistic. And yet at the same time he values the negatives as means to an end, an impetus, as it were, for problem solving. This understanding of his is perhaps a less strong version of Kalsner's (1992) and Cavaliere's (1997) image of failure as feedback for problem solving.

According to James, his motivation for moving ahead with his literacy and his education has nothing to do with economic reasons. "It is zero about getting a good job, but about doing what I want to do. The most important thing is to know something. It's not about making money."

I thought James would respond this way to the motivation question, based on what he had said before about not wanting to spend one minute of his life doing something he hated. Given his chosen professional goal, that of becoming a college professor, and this recent statement about mostly wanting "to know something", it would be safe to say that James' overriding motivation is an intrinsic one. But I wanted to stay mindful of his earlier statements about not wanting to be different, which would imply that part of his motivation is, indeed, the wish to be an insider (Fingeret & Drennon, 1997; Delattre, 1983).

When we talked about the community college as an environment for him to do the kinds of growing that he's done, he betrayed the fact that he didn't have a very high opinion of community colleges before, but he has changed his mind. "It's not as terrible as I thought," he said. "I have had the best teachers, and the diversity is the best when it's treated well." According to him, a good teacher is "one that's passionate, about the subject matter and about the people listening, about understanding others, and about living itself." It was clear to me that the central nature of pedagogy in the community college had made a difference to James.

In talking about the experience of being a tutor, James explained how it is that he's able to put himself in the clients' shoes: "I feel like I'm doing something for them that no one ever did for me. And even if I'm not helping, at least I'm trying. I had teachers that tried to help, but they never asked me 'Why do you hate it so much?' They just always gave me a formula and said, 'Do this seven times and you'll be all right." In these descriptions of his understanding of the tutoring relationship, I saw echoed much of what Dell had said about his own mentoring of LD students, another instance among my pilgrims of the need to give to others what has been gained. I also saw a kind of flip-side role for the community college writing center, as a place to benefit not just from receiving tutoring but also from having an outlet for giving tutoring, which can have benefits of its own.

From other conversations that we'd had, I knew that James does not make use of the learning disabilities counseling that's available to him here. I alluded to that at the end of our interview, and he affirmed, "I don't ask for help except as a last resort, because the real world doesn't operate that way. I have to do it on my own to succeed. At least I have to define the problem for myself, or fail or bleed first. If you can't identify the problem, any help you get won't stick or be helpful."

Again, I saw clarification of James' problem solving approach and probably also a key to his success as a tutor. Help doesn't work, he thinks, unless he himself can "identify the problem." This idea of his is a further elaboration on the metacognitive strategies he uses on himself: "Why is this hard? What's the reason?" I can imagine that he leads the students he tutors into the same kinds of self-understanding and self-monitoring that he uses on himself.

Like Dell, James manifests Richardson, Okun, & Fisk's (1983) broad definition of literacy in mostly academic contexts. But these are the most important contexts for him at the moment, and they are the contexts for literacy that have eluded him for most of his life.

As far as Fingeret & Drennon's spiral model of literacy acquisition goes, it was clear that, like Dell, James had experienced all five aspects. His prolonged tension began with the Iowa test in second grade and continued through high school, and in some respects even through the music conservatory. His turning point really came when he realized that music could not tell his story, that his story would have to be told in words that others could understand. This realization was the trigger for him to face head on the literacy limits that had been with him for so long. In dealing with these limits, he was forced to seek new educational experiences and develop problem-solving strategies to deal with his difficulties. He noticed a change in his old relationships with friends and also noticed that the confidence he gained as his literacy advanced allowed him to apply similar problem-solving strategies to real life issues. And finally, by choosing to be an English major and a writing center tutor, he ensured himself of a continuing interaction with literacy issues and enhancement of his own literacy.

Literacy purposes for James are a more complex topic to discuss. The overriding purpose is clearly the desire to change his life (Fingeret & Drennon (1997), to no longer be what he was, limited by a lack of sufficient skill with the written word. But in addition to this larger purpose, it is clear that some of Stein's (1995) descriptions of purpose apply to James. He was quite transparent when he described not being able to get his stories across with music. He wanted a voice. And he wanted access to the academic world that had previously been denied him. And with his new chosen profession, he was using literacy as a bridge to the future.

As discussed earlier, James stated motivation is an intrinsic one, for the pure love of and desire for knowledge. But we saw signs at the beginning of his progress that he was also interested in not feeling so different from other people, as if he didn't belong anywhere. Together with the fact that he has a story that he wants to communicate, this desire to belong to something made me see at least a part of his motivation coming from the desire to be an insider (Fingeret & Drennon, 1987; Delattre, 1983).

Concerning the role of the community college in James' literacy journey, the evidence is less clear. Although he has benefited from and appreciated the pedagogy-centeredness of the institution, and has found an outlet for his need to give his new-found understanding to others through the writing center, he has not used as many of the developmental services of the community college as we might have expected. He has performed these developmental functions for himself, it seems, without much outside help. Still, the community college was obviously a safer and less threatening place for James to begin his journey into academia that a four-year institution might have been.

James did not avoid talking about failure the way Dell did, nor was he as bent on framing everything in positives. He viewed negatives as yet another way of growing and learning about himself. Failure or difficulty became a route to problem solving, as described by Kalsner (1992) and Cavaliere (1997).

Perhaps James' strongest characteristic was the inner drive (Wlodkowski, 1985) that led him to reach for his potential and his desires. In this way, he seemed very similar to Dell. Although he described the future in a more low-key way than Dell had, I sensed that he would exhibit the same persistence and stamina in the face of future obstacles that one would expect from Dell.

Self knowledge and metacognitive strategies are, I believe, a huge part of James' success on his literacy path. He seemed exceptional to me in that regard. These strategies were evident in Dell's story, too, but not to the degree that they are for James. He has raised metacognitive activity to an art form, and it has certainly paid off for him. He also seems to use the strategy of self-narrative for motivation to a greater extent than Dell does.

The two qualities that I found in Dell, that of giving back to others what he has learned for himself, and that of maintaining a positive stance toward the future are somewhat similar in James. Definitely the giving back is similar, through his tutoring in the writing center. As far as the future is concerned, while Dell might well explode his way through obstacles, one senses that James will take a more measured and introspective approach to seeming roadblocks. But the result will be the same: James will not turn back, or stop trying to move forward, because he wants to be different from what he's been.

CHAPTER VI

"TAKE THE REARVIEW MIRROR AND THROW IT AWAY."

Not all writing centers work with faculty. In fact, there was a long discussion on the National Writing Center Association's listserv just last week on this subject, the pros and cons of having faculty as clients. At my school, we have worked with many faculty over the years on a variety of projects, from tenure and promotion portfolios to revisions of articles for publication in a variety of journals to papers for graduate courses to dissertation proposals. This might seem an unlikely practice for a community college writing center, but is has always worked for us and been a highly satisfying part of what we do.

Indiana was one such of our clients. Indiana is a member of the math and science department at my school, in his early forties. He came to the writing center a few years ago because he was assigned to write software reviews for his department and had never really done any extensive formal writing. I chose to include him in my study because I knew that he had taken the writing skills he'd developed for this project and transferred them to one of his own. And I also knew that he had subsequently suffered injuries in a car accident, some that had caused cognitive impairment, but that somehow he had come back to his writing. I wanted to know how that unfolded for him. If James was an example of a person motivated to literacy by a desire to change his life, it turns out that Indiana wound up literally writing for his life.

In our interview, Indiana told me that he had realized early in his schooling that writing and reading were not his strong suits. They were very difficult for him, he didn't like them, and he found the materials that were used in presenting them very uninteresting. The only writing he remembers being interested in was about sports. He wrote a question-and-answer sports column for the school paper. He decided early on that math and science and technical subjects were the things that he was good at. He remembers that all through college he never had to write a term paper. All his term projects were choices between writing a paper and creating a computer program, and he chose to write programs. He explained that not doing any writing didn't make it any better. He said that even after he finished graduate school, writing would've been a challenge to him. "Writing a couple of paragraphs or responding to questions in the technical area I was studying was easy because you had the interest and the expertise. But if you asked me to write a letter for something, that was a little challenge for lack of doing it. If there was a way around it, I'd gotten pretty good at finding a way of avoiding it, which is quite common to the human situation." He did come to realize during his undergraduate years, though, that he was a good verbal communicator of technical information, and that he might be able to use this skill in teaching.

When he came to the writing center a few years ago for help with writing software reviews, his tutor was able to help him see that good writing followed some of the same principles of clarity and order that he was always practicing verbally in his teaching, and that grammar and sentence structure could be dealt with separately once the ideas were formulated. Once he understood the similarity, and because the subject he was writing about was a very familiar one, he found that this task came fairly easily. "I still have those pieces of writing," he told me. "When I look at them, I see how far I've come."

He told me that at about the same time, he was called upon to write letters of recommendation for two of his colleagues, one of them his former English teacher, for either promotion or a teaching award of some kind. He remembered this English teacher once saying to him, “It’s easy to write if you have something to say.” And indeed he found writing these letters fairly easy. “I knew them, had a good understanding and a very positive feeling toward them, and for the second time, without any. . . it was very easy to convey what I wanted to say.” His English teacher came to him later and said, “I don’t know what you’ve done, but you’ve turned yourself into a writer.” Indiana said to himself at that point, “There’s untapped ability here that I’m just not getting a chance to use in the classroom because that’s not what I’m teaching. Someday I have to try and use it.” He did begin to use it soon for his own purposes, writing some short articles for railroad history magazines.

In trying to apply Fingeret & Drennon’s (1997) spiral model to Indiana, it is difficult to name his period of prolonged tension. Although writing had always been difficult for him and not one of his strengths, his chosen field did not require it of him, so there was no awareness of a real lack. However, when circumstances came together to combine writing center conversations with subject material that was familiar to him, the stage was set for a turning point.

At about the time that Indiana’s life as a writer was beginning to blossom, he was severely injured in a head-on car crash. Among his injuries was a severe brain trauma which put him in a rehab hospital for several months, relearning how to function, trying to recover things that he used to know which were now gone. One of the hardest things for him to relearn was the computer. His young daughter helped him. He explained, "It seemed to be worse for the computer because the computer evolves. Math has stayed steady in its concepts, so I could relearn it more easily. The computer presented a greater challenge because it was more dynamic. I'd learn a program, and it gets updated, and there's a change, and it was hard to make the adaptation due to the injury." There was a question whether he would ever teach again. I had talked to him soon after he came back, and he had explained how hard it was to be trying to function with a disability that no one else could see. To the outside observer, he looked the same; therefore, he was treated the same and expected to perform the same. But on the inside he was different, and functioning in his role as a teacher was hard. He had spent from April through August preparing for his classes. He had asked for four different preparations to get a feel for what he could do, but he realized right away that "I had difficulties; I was afraid, terrified." His family and attorneys didn't want him to do it. "My lawyers wanted me to live in the past, but I had to move ahead in the best interests of me and my family. I'll be damned if I'll go backward when I have only tomorrow to deal with."

I was struck here not only by Indiana's courage in the face of a huge obstacle, but also in the similarity of the sentiment he expressed to those of James and Dell. "I'll be damned if I'll go backward" struck my ears in the same way that James' statements about being sick of his situation and Dell's resistance to turning back from his first community college had. All three expressions seemed to derive from the "internal force" described by Wlodkowski (1985) that I've mentioned before. It seems that such courage and determination could only come from deep down inside a person.

Indiana relearned his subject matter and devised a new structure for his teaching that would accommodate his disability. "I wrote notes for classes that I'd never needed notes for, checklists for remembering. I changed the classroom overnight, and it became an advantage. My structured syllabus, topics, and exam schedules allowed some students to move ahead. There were no math symbols on the computer, so I found a software package with math capabilities. Preparedness is the key, and being honest with students about my own uncertainty. It made me a better teacher. Using mistakes, changing negatives into positives, has been part of the rehab. Every mess-up in class has gone with a laugh and a, 'See, I did the same thing you do.'"

Here we can see Indiana's problem-solving approach in full swing. In working to ease the obstacles to his teaching, he found benefits to the whole classroom atmosphere. His notion of "turning positives into negatives" echoes James' and Dell's remarks about positives and negatives. What could have been construed as a failure, a man who could not teach as he had before, was transformed into a step forward through his problem solving (Kalsner, 1992; Cavaliere, 1997). The biggest part of this process seemed to me to be Indiana's coming to terms with "mistakes" and turning them into assets.

Soon after his accident, Indiana helped to start a local railroad historical society in his county. He explained to me that there are hundreds of such societies throughout the country, some national, some regional, and many devoted to individual railroads, and thousands of members. He had belonged to several before, but he reached a point where he felt that it was time to create a local chapter centered on the O & W railroad that ran through his own county. At the beginning of his local society (it has now grown to around 100 members), he found himself having to write membership forms, flyers, anything to generate membership and revenue. "Because of my interest, it was very easy to start putting things on paper." Then the society published a book of steam locomotive diagrams, and he had to write the foreword dedicated to a late member. I asked how it was, writing that. "Pretty easy. There were the usual grammatical mistakes, which was understandable, but it was easy to want to do that." Then a second big project needed to be done, enhancing a map and study they had found of one of the small cities on the railroad. As Indiana expressed it, "All of a sudden things just started to happen. With doing the society business, doing letters, sales pages (descriptions of articles for sale), and corresponding with people and sending letters to new members, before you know it you're writing a lot more often. The more you do it, the more you feel comfortable. I think it was an intimidation. It was a weak spot, I should avoid it, and by not doing it, it was worse. And I was afraid to make a mistake because in my field of study, even at lower levels, I never made a mistake. It was about perfection, so you gravitate toward where you'll succeed as opposed to what's not coming naturally."

So at first, Indiana's new forays into writing assumed a problem-solving form. Tasks in writing appeared that needed to be done for a purpose that was important to him, and as each task appeared, he was forced to devise a way of carrying it out. He described in this part of the interview his own assessment of what his motivation had been to avoid writing. It was hard; he made mistakes; he was a perfectionist and found that he could achieve perfection in math and science. And later he would say that his teachers actually excused his avoidance of writing by telling him, "It's okay; you're a math person; you don't need to write." So he had fallen under the spell of a pedagogy of motivation that Wigg (1994) describes as "fostering strengths" (p. 166). Indiana's strengths were in math, science, and technical subjects, and his educational experience had played to those strengths rather than challenging him in his weaknesses.

When Indiana began writing on a regular basis for his historical society, he was using the computer, a practice that had been second nature to him for other purposes. He found that using the spelling and grammar checker made him less intimidated about making mistakes. “The more you do, the more you get better, the more you enjoy it and you don’t mind making a mistake because you know you’ll correct it. The computer was probably the most important thing because it allowed me to do changes quickly.”

So Indiana’s first exercise in problem solving happened almost automatically: use what’s familiar to you to succeed at something that isn’t. Interestingly, he is about the only one of the participants who mentioned the value of computer technology to the literacy quest. Since one of his biggest obstacles was the fear of making mistakes, the computer was crucial in minimizing this obstacle.

Another big part of his writing for the society was the research needed for each article that he produced. I asked him how he learned to do the railroad research. “Strictly out of love. There is an archive center with maps where you have to go digging through boxes. What pushed me in that direction was the society’s web page. Another member created it, and I wanted it to have a map, with mileposts and towers, so people who log on have an understanding of where the railroad went. And that listing led me to think, ‘Why not take a small segment and embellish it, and teach members to contribute small articles, like taking a trip as if you’re on a vestibule of a coach, make it interesting?’” So one thing led to another for Indiana, and he learned how to do each new task as he needed to know it.

Aside from the new kind of literacy gained by doing the railroad research, I saw something else happening here. Indiana viewed himself at this point as part of a certain social group, the railroad historical society. More importantly, it was a social group of his own choosing and creation, one that meant a great deal to him. It was at the point that he mentioned his idea to "teach members to contribute small articles" to the web site that I realized that not only was he, like Dell and James, sharing what he had learned to do, but also that this literacy practice of his could be construed, in Brandt's (1990) terms of "context resonance and social solidarity".

Indiana called his responding to the task at hand "on-the-job training". When he had to do a new thing, he would run it by a more experienced person in the society. "I didn't want to reinvent the wheel. I learned from my technical background, if you have tools, use them. We're still using some of the ads I wrote then. One nice little ad ran in three or four magazines. It was neat. I wrote this, and here it is in a magazine. I don't care if it's only two inches; I wrote this. It's a big thrill; I get a big charge seeing my name anywhere."

First here, we can see Indiana's problem solving at work when he had to do a new thing. He responded to its newness by employing a maxim from his technical background, thus using "literate know how" (Brandt, 1990, p. 194), transferring literacy from one area to another. The maxim, "If you have tools, use them", became a tool itself in his problem solving approach to tasks. As a teacher, he could've been applying a couple of Wlodkowski's (1985) steps in a pedagogy of motivation to himself: appealing to his own competence and reinforcing his own feeling of success.

I had wondered to myself over these few years whether Indiana's accident had interfered with his writing, but I hadn't wanted to ask him. It turned out, as I learned during our interview, that after the accident writing became not just a sideline, a hobby, for him, but the central focus of his life. He used it to remind himself of the things he could no longer remember, to document what was happening with doctors and lawyers, and to create notes for classes that he used to teach out of his head. He was now sharing these notes with students, collecting their feedback, and planning to turn them into a user-friendly math book. And, yes, he was still writing railroad articles. I asked him whether the accident had changed his ability to write. He said, "It didn't so much change the writing skills, because I'm not so sure how well my skills were developed and my confidence in it. What it did do was finally make me realize that I had nothing to lose, I could throw caution to the winds. Let's write it down on paper. In other words, I'm standing in front of the classroom, and there are times when I'm gonna look like a fool because I'm having a bad day, and so if I can do that in front of thirty people, there's no reason I can't write something on paper."

So what had once been a problem for Indiana and an object of his problem solving, writing, had now become a problem-solving tool itself, applied to other obstacles and difficulties. One has to suspect that one of the effects of Indiana's increased use of literacy was, as Lytle & Wolf (1989) suggest, an "increased self esteem and self determination" (p. 66) that allowed him to take his own mistakes and short-comings in stride. Another effect seems to be that of better ways to "communicate at work" (p. 66), surely both evidence that literacy was working its magic in his life. In addition, I could see an increase in knowledge about himself and his own strengths and weaknesses that was enhancing his ability to solve problems (Chaplin, (1993).

Indiana remembered that when he was in school, he was told that he didn't need to know about writing because he was a math person. He realizes now that that was the wrong message for him to hear. "No, I don't accept that anymore. I want to be a better writer today than I was yesterday because that's what makes me a well-rounded person. If you are well-rounded, you have all these other tools to pick yourself up, other opportunities; you can easily switch. . . And it's a good example to my children." To his daughters he says: "This is what I wrote. Look, this is in a magazine. This is what Daddy did." As a result, his oldest daughter has written letters to her school principle about issues that were important to her, and she received a reply to a letter that she wrote to an ice cream company complaining about their containers. He wants to give his children an appreciation for writing that he didn't have when he was younger. "I think the writing and those areas are important, because with e-mail and the web, there are more opportunities and needs to communicate with the word. Words are your representative to the world. . . The world is getting so dynamic, there's no reason why everyone shouldn't be able to aspire to write better."

In these comments from Indiana, I could discern two things. First of all, in his push to overcome old messages about the unimportance of writing to him and become what he saw as a "well-rounded person", I saw Wlodkowski's (1985) "internal force". No one gave him that idea or that motivation; it came strictly from within.

The second thing I saw was one of the effects of literacy as described by Lytle & Wolf (1989), the desire to "encourage children" (p. 66), his children, in ways that he was never encouraged. His understanding of the need for a wider expertise with literacy that he expressed here connects with Stein's (1995) notion of one of the purposes of literacy: to have a voice.

Indiana told me about an article of his that the local historical society had put on its web page. "They put it on because they said it's timeless because it talks about how you do the research. I realized that I had created something special in my little world, and it makes me want to do more. It gives me joy, a desire to start a new project or go back and revisit old ideas with a new eye." Then he paraphrased a line from a movie he had seen: "Take the rearview mirror and throw it away and full speed ahead."

Indiana showed me here one example of the kind of reinforcement (Wlodkowski, 1985) a successful experience can give to a literacy seeker, and how this kind of reinforcement can become itself a source of motivation, making him "want to do more."

Because I was (and am) interested in how these participants have used their own stories to motivate themselves, I asked him whether there aren't times when the rearview mirror comes in handy for facing the next hard thing. He agreed that it does help sometimes to look in the mirror and say, "You've been through this." It gives him "something to hold on to."

But he explained that the reason he doesn't like the rear-view mirror is that on a regular basis his family and friends would say, "This is what you used to be." "I found this distracting when I was trying to move forward and deal with who I am. I'm not who I was before. . . I'm not sorry. I think my life is better; everything tastes like a wonderful glass of wine. I only wish I'd had this ability when I was sixteen, but that's okay. . . When I see something that I have a passion for, I'm going to write about it. Writing has gone from a compensation to an asset, almost the point of my life, always leading to the next thing. My notes are becoming a math textbook for people who don't like math. I'm getting feedback from students. I was hesitant at first about giving them my notes, but I realized that there are fewer people in the class seeing my notes than looking at my articles on the web page. What's the difference? They are giving me ideas how to rewrite, so I'm even working on my writing while I'm teaching. Everything is being used in a positive fashion to create the finished product."

Everything, in other words, is used as a problem-solving tool in his effort to turn what could have been a negative into a positive. The need for notes that were unnecessary before, which could have been viewed as a negative, became instead the beginning of a user-friendly math book. It was at this point that I most clearly saw Indiana's adherence to the definition of literacy proposed by Richardson, Okun & Fisk (1983): "the use of reading and writing as skills in service of a goal to accomplish transactions within a given context" (p. 4). Indiana has reached the point where he knows enough about writing to use it to accomplish his goal of functioning in the classroom and interacting with his students in new ways. As a by-product, he plans to transcend the context of his individual classroom by creating a new kind of textbook. And I saw Stein's (1995) idea that one of the purposes of literacy is to provide a "bridge to the future" (p. 64) when Indiana talked about writing always "leading to the next thing".

At this point in the interview, I shared with Indiana some of Dell and James' stories, their stubbornness and persistence in the face of those who gave them "no" for an answer. I explained it as an attitude which says, "If you tell me I can't, that's what I want to do." He found it easy to relate to this attitude. "Yes, I really take offense when you tell me I can't. Now if I try and I fail, I can accept that. But not to be given an opportunity because someone tells me it's impossible makes me want to get out that hook, and throw it right up on the Palisade Cliffs, and go right up the side and say, 'See, I told you so.

You were wrong.' And I don't like somebody saying that to my students or anybody. . . I don't believe in no-win scenarios. I think there's always a way to win. One of the ways to win sometimes is to take that one step back, or take that chance, riding and sticking it out and see what happens. If you don't, the opportunity may pass, or more opportunities ahead might not happen. Writing to me is one of those steps forward, because it exposes a part of me to anybody who picks up that paper or clicks on the web page."

Here again I saw Stein's (1995) bridge to the future as one of Indiana's literacy purposes. Indiana described writing as "one of those steps forward", and dwelt on the idea of possibilities that lead to other possibilities. He talked about failure here, as James did and Dell didn't, but although he used the word, I didn't see failure as something that he allowed to be a viable option. There is always a way, he thinks, to turn a negative into a positive, thus demonstrating that he believes in the notion of failure as a resource for problem solving (Kalsner, 1992; Cavaliere, 1997).

Since I had noticed that part of the learning that Dell and James had experienced was knowledge about themselves, I wanted to see if this was true for Indiana, too. "Absolutely," he answered. "I've come to know myself much better. I have the confidence to try and not be afraid of failing. Failure leads to problem solving. I have openness to input in both teaching and writing. Letting students correct me changes everything. The most blunderous of mistakes can be used for learning and become a positive experience. Writing has been the big way for getting there. My speaking to the class is what I put on paper to write these books. My teaching lectures became notes and are becoming a book. They were always there, but not on paper. What I can draw upon, my communication skills, writing is just another form. I wish I had known that twenty years ago. You can't start with War and Peace. It's a process. Blurbs become ads which become an article which becomes a long article with pictures which becomes a book. And there is feedback and research along the way."

His description of the process, I told him, sounded organic to me. "Yeah", he said, "it grows. And I like to grow things. Math can be intimidating because there's no margin for error. But writing is open-ended. You have to adapt to other areas. I think that's what's happening to me, and I'm growing. It's wonderful." It was obvious that writing for Indiana has proven to be a way for him to change his life, bearing out Fingeret & Drennon's (1997) assessment that the main overriding purpose of increasing literacy is to change one's life. At the end of the interview, Indiana mentioned that he might like to teach something other than math and technical subjects someday. Although he never said so in so many words, I imagined that he might have in mind becoming a writing teacher.

So, how does Indiana's story connect with my major themes from the literature? As I mentioned earlier, there is clear evidence that his literacy picture mirrors very closely Richardson, Okun, & Fisk's (1983) definition of literacy. He uses writing as an operation to support specific goals in specific transactional contexts. In addition, his goals keep progressing and proliferating as he sees new ways that his writing can serve him in his various contexts.

Although, as I mentioned earlier, it is hard to pinpoint in Indiana's story Fingeret and Drennon's (1997) initial aspect of their spiral model of literacy acquisition, that of prolonged tension, its other aspects are clearer. It seems that the turning point came for him when he had a few writing tasks that offered both a familiar subject matter and the readily available services of the writing center. Although my memory of his encounter with the writing center casts it as more of an epiphany experience than his does, I can attribute the difference to the loss of many details of memory that Indiana has experienced. However, this story is his, and as he has soft-pedaled the writing center experience in his interview, so shall I. At any rate, the timeframe of the turning point was generally agreed upon by both of us. As far as the problem-solving and seeking educational opportunities aspect of Fingeret & Drennon's (1997) model, we can see those at work as he began to write for his railroad society, his "on-the-job training", and his seeking help and advice from experienced experts within the society, so that he doesn't have to "reinvent the wheel." The model's notion of changing relationships and practices are evident in his new stance toward his daughters vis-a-vis writing and the new uses he found for writing after his accident. The model's "intensive continuing interaction" reveals itself most clearly when he says, "Writing has gone from a compensation to an asset, almost the point of my life. . . When I see something that I have a passion for, I'm going to write about it. . ." And his laptop allows him to "write about it" anywhere he is.

The life-changing purposes (Fingeret & Drennon, 1997) to which Indiana has applied his literacy are clear. He has used writing to become, almost literally, a new person, a person that did not exist before. In addition, he exhibits some of Stein's (1995) ideas of the purposes of literacy: as a voice in a computer age when, "Words are your representative in the world"; as a bridge to the future, where each piece of writing leads to the next opportunity; and, certainly, if we define independence in economic terms, as a path toward the independence that allowed him to keep his teaching job by creating new ways to be in the classroom that depended on the written word.

Sorting out Indiana's sources of motivation for increasing his literacy is a very complex task. Obviously, initially he needed literacy to carry out the task his department had set for him and to create social solidarity with colleagues who needed written recommendations from him. But as he used his literacy to get his historical society off the ground, I would describe that motivation as intrinsic, something that he wanted for its own sake. After his accident, the motivation for increased use of literacy could be viewed as extrinsic, too, as he used writing, basically, to hold on to his career in the classroom. But that, too, evolved toward more intrinsic goals of being a "more well-rounded person."

As far as the role that the community college played in Indiana's journey, I can speculate this: the fact that pedagogy was so central to his position on the he community college faculty played a huge role, when he returned from his accident, in motivating him to find new ways to be a teacher of students. This problem-solving approach led him to see writing as a tool that could inform the pedagogy upon which his career depended, and ultimately led to increased literacy for him.

Like Dell and James, Indiana has found ways to look at failure and difficulty that keep him forward-looking and positive. Like them, the "internal force" (Wlodkowski, 1985, p. 47) has been a major factor in keeping him on the path toward increased uses of literacy. All three realize that turning back means submitting to limits placed on them by others. And finally, like Dell and James, Indiana has found a way to share what he has gained, by exemplifying a literate life to his children and by teaching society members "to contribute small articles."

CHAPTER VII

"I KNOW HOW TO DO THAT; I'LL HELP YOU."

Many community colleges attract a sizeable number of international students to their campuses. My own school has roughly 200 such students at a given time. Since community college websites in this technological age are geared for recruitment, and since these web sites can be accessed around the world, it is no surprise that many foreign students come to see the community college as a logical entrée to higher education in the United States. Most community colleges have ESL programs that can make the transition to English-speaking classroom instruction easier for second language students, and many allow their second-language clientele to take selected content courses along with the ESL program. International students, like all entering students, are usually required to take placement exams in math and English, and then are enrolled at the suitable level in these areas.

Sarah entered the community college as one of these international students. One of her distinguishing qualities was that she developed metacognitive strategies that were as thorough and sophisticated as those that James used. The piece that she adds to the literacy puzzle, though, is that of a person trying to become an insider in a culture and language that are not her own.

I knew when I saw Sarah one fall a couple of years ago in my English composition class that she would probably be a good student. Although she was technically an international student, her skills in English had to be quite good in order for her to have been placed in a first-year composition class with native speakers rather than in one of the special sections reserved for international students. The class where I met her, in addition to three hours of classroom time, spent one hour a week in the writing center for reinforcement. It was a class with a strange attendance pattern. It met three times a week, and only two students, Sarah and another older student, were there for every class. It was like teaching a different group of people every day. So, of course, because of Sarah's good attendance, I got to know her quite well. Always stylishly dressed, she gave a very professional appearance. She was from Sweden and somewhat insecure about her writing in English. She was also, surprisingly, an orthodox Jew, a combination that I would not have expected. She was an absolutely eager student, sucking every drop she could out of my instruction. I kept in touch with her after that because she tutored anatomy and physiology in the tutoring center next door to my writing center. It was such a treat to watch her pursuing her goals in a highly systematic way that I asked her to participate in my study.

When I began the interview by asking Sarah to recall her earliest experiences with reading and writing, the first thing that came to her mind was that as a little girl in Sweden she used to write letters to God, asking him to fix things. She recalled that learning to read and write was fun. She read a lot and had learned to read before going to school. She read fast, usually a book a day, and she felt that all through her schooling she had been "lucky with reading and writing teachers." She got A's in English but never in Swedish. She wrote many poems in Swedish but stopped when she came to this country. "I lost touch with my language because I didn't hear it any more. And I was not as comfortable writing in English." I asked her if she missed the poetry writing. "Yeah, I did. I felt like I lost an expressive part of myself."

Right away it was clear that Sarah's situation was very different from those of Indiana, James, and Dell. There was no sign of language difficulty here, or of lack of confidence relating to reading and writing. Her most comfortable pursuit of literacy took place in her mother tongue, however, and she was "not as comfortable writing in English". What would this discomfort mean to her as she pursued higher literacy in the United States? How would she handle "cultural and social maintenance" (Merrifield, 1997)?

Sarah didn't attend college in Sweden, although she did take one university course in Hebrew. She started working when she graduated from high school at nineteen, trying to save money to leave Sweden. Sarah belonged to a non-practicing Jewish family, and as she explained, "I came to the United States to be in an orthodox community and explore that part of myself." She had traveled many times to Israel, but she wanted to see something else. She planned to come to this country for a year and then return to Israel. She enrolled in a seminary in New York City, the Jewish Renaissance Center, which had a program "for women like myself who didn't grow up orthodox and wanted to learn about their heritage."

Already I could sense that Sarah's purpose in coming to New York and enlarging her literacy was to change her life (Fingeret & Drennon, 1997). Something was missing for her, a sense of her religious and cultural heritage, and she wanted to come to a place where she could, perhaps, find the missing pieces.

The classes at the Center were in English. "It was hard in the beginning. I still don't relate to English the way I do to Swedish. It was hard, but I never got discouraged. I always put an effort into learning English. I read books out loud to myself; I made an attempt to imitate perfectly. I didn't want to have an accent. My mother, my sister and I all pick up accents very easily. In Israel I learned to speak English with an Israeli accent."

I asked Sarah about this wanting to speak correctly. I suggested that language is very close to a person and that maybe she wanted to fit in. "Oh, definitely", she answered. "I'm also conscious with employers, authority figures. People don't correct me, but that bothers me. I want them to. I don't want to make mistakes. I want to be able to speak professionally. I'm the same in writing. Your class was my first English class, and it was a very important class to me. I learned a lot about writing. It took the edge off, and I'm not so nervous any more."

So Sarah openly confessed to being motivated by a wish to fit in, to be an insider (Fingeret & Drennon, 1997; Delattre, 1983) with the new language. She didn't want to "make mistakes", but to "speak professionally." And she felt "the same in writing." I saw her desire to do things in the English language not only functionally, but also as others (native speakers) do them (Fingeret & Drennon, 1997). In her case, unlike Dell and James, the fitting in was on a cultural level (Wagner, 1986).

Sarah attended the seminary for two years, was married briefly, and came to the community college in 1997. When I asked what brought her back to school she said, "I always wanted to go to school, to get a degree. I recognize its importance in the United States. Also I had a thirst for knowledge, and I wanted to use my brain."

Sarah articulated in this short answer two types of motivation. I could see an extrinsic one (recognizing the importance of a degree in the United States) and an intrinsic one ("I had a thirst for knowledge. . . I wanted to use my brain").

Was the community college hard for her, I wondered? "It was hard at first, different from Sweden. I had a problem with disrespectful students and disorganized classes. I was used to raising hands, not speaking without permission. It [the Swedish school system] was old-fashioned and disciplined, but I liked it. With students blurting out, I didn't get a chance to show the teacher that I knew the material. I was sitting in my corner saying nothing because I didn't have the guts to just blurt it out. I do it now; I learned quickly. I was nervous about my first Scantron test. I seemed like a strange system. Why were they making it so easy? But it wasn't. Also, because I was an older student, I related differently to the teacher than the younger students. I spent about a year sitting in the back of the class, watching and figuring it out, how the teacher relates. I admire teachers."

What Sarah described here put her definitely in the position of outsider (Delattre, 1983; Fingeret & Drennon, 1997), but not because of language. The system was "strange". Classroom protocol was different. She responded to this cultural difference with silence. I confess that at this point I was reminded of a consideration that I'd thought of as I was collecting literature for my study. I wondered at that time whether I would find gender considerations, especially those of silence and connectedness as depicted by writers such as Belenky, et al (1986) and Gilligan (1982). At the time I decided that gender was just one issue too many for me to deal with in my study. When Sarah described her silence, it actually reminded me of something Dell had said, in his advice to other young LD students, that they should "Be quiet." So I concluded at this point that silence, at least, was not confined to one gender. And in Sarah's case, it seemed that in one sense her silence resulted not from gender, but from being in a confusing situation where she wasn't sure how to make her voice heard, how to "show the teacher that I knew the material". But in another sense, one could make the case that she used her silence for problem solving, "watching and figuring out" and taking her cues from the teacher.

In terms of experiences of something being too hard for her, Sarah explains, "Organic chemistry almost killed me, but I never felt there was something too hard for me. I felt challenged, but not to give up. I used every resource—tutors, books—I had to work for it." Which resource did she use first, I wondered out loud. "The teacher first, a tutor second, additional books and gradually the Internet. Not really other students." Sarah had said before that she admired teachers, and she had showed that she looked to the teacher for signals about the culture of the classroom. Now she made it clear that the teacher was her main resource, and that appealing to other students was not one of her problem-solving strategies.

I asked whether Sarah ever felt that unfair things were being asked of her. "Yeah, some teachers asked for too much, or could not stick to a subject. There was a heavy work load, but not to the point that I couldn't do it." In terms of failures Sarah says, "I'm a perfectionist, so getting a B in chemistry, I guess, is a failure for me. It was a big frustration. I was getting bad things from the teacher that made me angry. He was hitting people below the belt. (Actually, at this point Sarah said "under the belt", and I didn't correct her. Later when I transcribed what she had said earlier about wanting to be corrected, I felt bad that I hadn't). But it didn't make me want to give up. I wanted to kick his ass. It pushed me forward. It made me want to go to the department head. I knew that it wasn't that I wasn't intelligent enough; I just knew that I lacked the math, or that I could've done it if I was better prepared. The next chemistry was different; it wasn't math-based. But the teacher was not in touch and the book sucked. I got my second B."

What a message Sarah gave me here. First of all, she showed me her own reaction to the possibility of failure, which she perceived to be caused by a teacher who was unfair. As was the case with Dell, James and Indiana, this situation "pushed me forward", she said. It was clear that she perceived this threat of failure as a form of motivation, the same way the others had. She used it as feedback (Cavaliere, 1997), but the feedback told her that the fault was with the teacher, not with her. "I knew that it wasn't that I wasn't intelligent enough. . .", she said, giving me a glimpse of her self-efficacy and mastery orientation (Kalsner, 1992).

She mentioned here that because of the horrible textbook, she ended up buying other books. I asked her whose idea this was, and she said, "Oh, my friend Tom." I reminded her that she had said she didn't go to other students for help, and she realized that she does, but that she's choosy about which ones. Tom, another older student, has proved his reliability to her.

Now Sarah has transferred to New York University and is pursuing a degree in dietetics. She's taking only two classes this semester because she's preparing for her wedding in May, and I asked her how she likes them. One is a computer class taught "not by a teacher, but a dietician. It makes a big, big difference. I want teachers. I don't care if you're a dietician. Share your experience with me on your coffee break. Please don't teach me in class. I'm so against that." At this point I said, "What is it about teachers?" She answered, "Teachers are teachers. They know how to teach. It doesn't matter what the subject is. They just know how to talk to you. He doesn't know how to explain things. He says, 'Push this button', and I think, 'Tell me why.' He doesn't challenge me."

Sarah said so much about teachers during her interview. She wants knowledge, and she believes that the best source for knowledge is the person who "knows how to talk to you". But what jumped out at me in this part of the interview was the confidence and sense of self that she exhibited. She knows what she wants, she knows what she needs, and she had found the voice to demand these things. I could only assume that the strength of this voice was one of the by-products of her increased literacy (Lytle & Wolfe, 1989).

Her other class is the kind where, according to Sarah, "you curse the teacher out all semester and thank him at the end." New York University has a World Cultures requirement, and this was the only course open when she registered. Ironically, it is called "Ancient Israel". The course is mostly based on the Bible, but even though it's taught by an orthodox teacher, the approach is a secular one. Sarah says, "We're writing a ten-page paper this week, and he has pushed me to my limit and it is so—great!"

What does pushing to the limit look like, I wonder. She explained, "In the first place, he talks to me as an adult. If you ask for help, he gives you a challenge, offers you an idea. I think, 'Just tell me what to do!' The NYU library has fourteen floors. Nobody ever goes there because it's too intimidating. He gave an assignment needing books only to be found in the NYU library. I know because I looked everywhere else first. You have to go in, use the computer, find the book. For this paper you have to use journals, books, on-line sources, the whole range. You have to find them. It gets you to work and use resources and write a very professional paper. I came up with a topic and sent him a long e-mail, which I don't think the other students did. And he e-mailed back and rearranged the whole thing into something that was much harder, and I can appreciate it. My paper's going to be fabulous! He showed me how to do it in a more professional way than I've ever done before. It's a real research paper, and I'm so excited (I'm such a nerd.) So even if I get a B on the paper, I've learned something. From him I'm learning".

Once again Sarah's conversation came around to the teacher and how the teacher operated. The push she described this teacher giving her was clearly a push toward a higher level of literacy: the library research, the harder plan for the paper, the results that she anticipated would be "fabulous." Complicated as it is to analyze this part of Sarah's story, my take on it is as follows. I think what Sarah experienced with this kind of teaching was a path toward a higher literacy based on a more complex kind of knowledge. I was reminded of Reder's (1998) reciprocal model of knowledge and literacy. As the teacher led her into more of the tools of literacy (the NYU library, a different format for her paper), she could see that the literacy tools led to a more sophisticated way of handling knowledge. Each one (knowledge, literacy) advanced the other.

I asked whether she'll be more comfortable using that library now. "Absolutely," she answered. "I can find anything. Others are avoiding it, so I say 'I know how to do it. I'll help you.' It's not so hard once you figure it out." Once again, I saw the practice of giving to others what one had gained for oneself. I had witnessed this in Dell, in James, and in Indiana, and I sensed that it would turn out to be one of the common traits for almost all of my participants.

Sarah wants to write books in the future. She wants to write one about her family "because my family is interesting", books about diabetes, and a cookbook with her husband-to-be. "We cook together, and I want to make a book together." She thinks she might even want to teach. "Teaching is, education is, a gift that I have received from so many teachers, and I wouldn't mind giving that back to somebody who can appreciate it—adults." Again, the giving back, to someone like herself who can appreciate it.

I reminded Sarah that she came to this country because she was interested in changing her life, wanted something different for herself. I asked whether coming to school had the same purpose. "Yeah," she answered. "This community college changed my life. It was a safe environment for me. I was free to develop without. . ., it's not a high-pressure place. At first I thought, 'I can't do it', but it allowed me to develop at my own pace, which is what I needed. I was nervous because of the language. Coming here was a mature decision, and I have had the time of my life here. I've met wonderful, wonderful people, students and teachers, and I have learned so much. Such a great place to start off. . . I felt embraced here. People weren't holding you back. I felt respected by teachers and that means a lot. . . It opened up more opportunities than I thought it would. I felt taken care of when I needed it. I needed to be here, and I think I got the best out of it. It's very precious."

I couldn't have created a more eloquent statement about the developmental nature of the community college if I had tried. Sarah covered it all here: the respect, the ability to work at one's own pace, the feeling of safety, and the lack of pressure all coupled with learning and opportunity. We should hire Sarah as a recruiter. It would be easy to dismiss her kudos by simply saying that Sarah would have had a wonderful educational experience no matter where she attended college because she know how to be a student.

But good students need what the community college has to offer, too. When Sarah said, "I needed to be here", I had to take her at her word.

"Perhaps," I suggested, "there's a sense in which you got the best because you knew how to get it. Do you sense that you know now how to get things out of the system that exists?" Sarah believes that this is true, "but it took me a while to learn it. I mean I used every single resource that's here, writing center, teachers, computers, everything. If I needed help, I went and I got it. I learned how to ask questions, because I never knew how to do that. I'm part of the lost computer generation. I ask questions all the time in computer class: slow down, don't go so fast, go over it. I never used to be like that. I'm paying a lot of money for that course, and I'm going to get what I need. That's probably what changed in me. I'm a little bit more of a go-getter now." Sarah sees the "literate know how" (Brandt, 1990, p. 194) that she exhibits now, the ability to use resources and to ask for what she needs, as something that she didn't have before. I had to believe that it comes from two sources: her own higher level of literacy and the developmental atmosphere of the community college.

My next question was about Sarah's motivation. Was it economic? A desire to learn? Wanting to fit in? She believes that it's a combination of all of these. "The biggest part is wanting to learn because God blessed me with a brain, and I should use it. I see that I've developed areas of my brain that I didn't think existed, and I'm fascinated by that because I've seen that I can learn anything, including chemistry. One part—I like a challenge. Of course I want to get a degree. We're judged based on that in the society. And I want to pay my bills. But I know that on breaks when I'm not taking classes, I'm very unsatisfied. . ." Although it was clear that intrinsic motivation was high for Sarah, the pursuit of learning for its own sake, I thought it quite wise of her to realize that present, too, were the desire to be employable and the desire to fit in.

"Does it help," I asked, " when you're going to do the next hard thing, to look back at challenges you've met? Do you tell stories to yourself about your journey?" "Yeah, you have to do that because you forget otherwise," Sarah responded. "Yeah, I do that; I go back; I do." Although this was all Sarah really had to say about self-narrative, and although she really didn't give me any examples of her use of it, I must conclude that it serves at least some function in her motivation.

Sarah remembered at this point that one of the things she's learned about is her own learning. For each new task she makes up a pattern or a schedule for herself of how to go about it. "And if I feel confused and don't know how to start, I seek somebody's help, an expert. I learn differently now than I used to. I recognize that I learn more than one way. It's not just reading it, it's writing it, it's seeing it, it's hearing it. I try to combine all those components. . . I learned by trial and error that if I do it that way, I retain more. . . I tell that to the students I tutor. I read things aloud to myself. Five times is the magic number. I write it with my own hand. Typing with computer, I don't learn as well. We all have our shticks. I'm very clear on how I learn. I pretend explaining it to someone else. Learning takes a lot of effort." Like Dell and James, Sarah has found that metacognitive practices (Paris & Parecki, 1993) help her to be successful academically.

When I asked Sarah whether she had any last words for the tape recorder, she somehow shifted us to the topic of the cultural tightrope she walks, between orthodox Jew and secular student. "You need to keep an open mind. This class on Ancient Israel, for instance, is forcing me to use academic sources instead of religious ones for my paper on the Book of Ruth. I had an internal resistance because of my orthodoxy, but I find I've enjoyed the different perspective. I think the cultural tightrope is important. But I can keep my mind open and allow myself to learn without feeling threatened by others' beliefs." A different literacy practice (using academic sources instead of religious ones) has allowed Sarah to more clearly see her cultural tightrope and at the same time to walk it in a more sophisticated way.

Sarah fits the definition of literacy put forth by Richardson, Okun, & Fisk (1983) at perhaps the highest level of any participant so far. Evidenced by her recent paper-writing experience at NYU, she has employed reading and writing (and library research) in the service of a goal (to create a truly professional paper) to accomplish transactions (to meet the suggestions of her professor) within a given context (a secular rather than an orthodox religious setting). This instance is merely the latest example of how she has used reading and writing this way.

Again, as with Indiana, it's difficult to pinpoint a period of prolonged tension and a turning point for Sarah as Fingeret & Drennon's (1997) spiral model suggests. She was always on the path to literacy, from the time she was a little girl. If I were to name these two points for her in terms of English-speaking literacy, I would say that they happened at the community college. I see her silent period, while she was "watching and figuring it out", as the time of prolonged tension, and the turning point coming when she moved from silence to voice because the atmosphere made her feel safe and gave her the flexible timetable for development that she needed. The next phase of the spiral model, the problem solving and seeking educational opportunities, along with the following changing relationships and especially practices, occurred also at the community college.

She began to use resources, she gained a voice, and she became what she now terms as a "go-getter". "I never used to be like that", she said. The final piece of the spiral model for Sarah is what she is doing now, in her paper on the Book of Ruth at NYU: stretching her intellect, adding to her repertoire of literacy skills, and developing a more sophisticated approach to both knowledge and her place in the world.

Sarah's purposes for her literacy clearly connect with a desire for increasing her knowledge (Reder, 1998; Brandt, 1990). Knowledge, in fact, seems to function for her both as a purpose and as a result. Literacy also helped her find her English-speaking voice, gave her a stronger confidence and self-determination, and offers her a bridge to the future as she envisions writing books and teaching others (Stein, 1995). Sarah wants to function in the English-speaking world like a native English-speaker (Fingeret & Drennon, 1997); she wants literacy for the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake (intrinsic); and she wants a professional career (extrinsic).

As far as the role of the community college in Sarah's literacy journey, I have already said that I think it's developmental nature provided an extremely beneficial setting for Sarah as she began her higher education in the United States. But she said it best herself: "The community college changed my life. . . I felt embraced here."

Two features that had been prominent in the stories of Indiana, James, and Dell appear to be missing from Sarah's. Nowhere in my conversation with her did she deal with the issue of turning back that the others had. Nor did she really articulate the "internal force" in a clear statement they way they had. Perhaps this lack could be attributed to the fact that Sarah had always been on the literacy path, while the others came to it as adults.

But the feature that she shares with them is the giving back, the sharing of what she has figured out with those who don't know it yet. She does this by teaching NYU students how to use the library, and she did it at the community college by tutoring students in anatomy and physiology and sharing her learning strategies with them.

CHAPTER EIGHT

"WHAT'S THE POINT OF BEING HERE FIVE YEARS DOING NOTHING?"

Not all international students at the community college are present in this country by choice or here only for study. Some have emigrated to the U. S., either as adults or as children, to escape political persecution or economic hardship. One would certainly expect a difference in motivation and attitude between those students who were pulled here by the lure of American higher education and those who were pushed here by hardships in their own country. In addition, there is an emerging group of foreign nationals whose situation has not been widely talked about in the media: women whose husbands bring them to this country and abandon them here. Raised in traditional cultures for the most part, where women lack both rights and voice, these women are hard pressed to muster the necessary skills and initiative to make successful lives for themselves in this country. Komal is such a woman.

Like Sarah, Komal struggled with issues of cultural adjustment, but whereas Sarah used metacognitive and reflective strategies to make the transition, Komal exhibited a more out-going and assertive approach. She exemplifies a problem-solving pragmatism to a higher degree than any of the other participants, and begins to raise the issue of voice as motivation and purpose for literacy.

Komal came into my life two years ago when she attended a weekly support class for second language students in the writing center. She struck me at the time as a very serious student, in her thirties, and a very out-going one, always smiling and ready to laugh. I was surprised by this second characteristic, since, by her dress, I knew that she was a traditional Muslim woman. In my experience, these women tend to be characterized by a certain shyness and reticence that she did not possess, even though she did have the traditional calmness and composure. Through the semester I watched her as she drew answers to her many questions from the teaching staff, as she offered assistance and advice to other students, and as she volunteered on a regular basis at the campus food bank. Her teacher told me some of Komal's background, and I became interested enough to ask her to participate in my study.

As with the other participants, I began my interview with Komal with questions about her early schooling and literacy activities. She was born in Pakistan, into a very traditional family. Her father was and is a prominent political figure there, and her mother, a traditional wife who stays in the home. Komal attended an English medium school, where she was a good student and always interested in reading. She was always reading many books, especially in Urdu, but also in English. Her father encouraged his children in their reading, sending them to the libraries in Karachi, and giving them money to buy books that couldn't be found there. She grew up fluent in Urdu, English, and Memoni, the local dialect. Because Sindhi was similar to Memoni in sound, she could use that dialect, too.

Writing in English was a struggle for her; her mother wasn't comfortable with English, and her father's busy schedule didn't allow much time for him to help her. Absence excuses were required to be written in English and signed by a parent. When she needed one, her father would say, "You need to write it and give it to me. I'll see how you write it, and then I'll sign it." Komal used to complain about this practice of his. She explained, "That was difficult for me. I didn't know how. But it gave me more practice in writing quickly and how to put it in words in a polite manner." At the same time, Komal's maternal relatives lived in India, and her cousins over there could only understand English, so she wrote letters to them in English. "It also gave me practice to process my thoughts in English and to explain a family get-together or party in the best way I could."

Komal's father was concerned that her English study was not as rigorous as that of her brothers. "When he figured out that I was not very good in English, not at his standard, he wanted to get me to the level where he is, and he always wanted to see me there." He devised a plan where she would read an English newspaper every day, choose a paragraph to read in front of him, and then explain to him what it meant. She told me, "When you're reading a paragraph from the newspaper and the words are very different, you'll go and pick up a dictionary and get that kind of practice. So in the evening when he comes and says, 'So, did you read any paragraph?', and I would tell him 'Yah', and then I would give him: 'This is what it is'. Then he'd listen and make me understand if I'm taking the wrong meaning. As a child it was a burden for me, so I used to try to find the smallest paragraph." Komal laughed at this point and then continued: "Now when I send him an article, he always says, 'Yah, yah, now you read all the long paragraphs.'"

Komal reported that in the home her father always spoke in Urdu with her because, she explained, "Memoni is a language in which you turn and twist your tongue, so in the case where a person speaks only Memoni, then when they speak Urdu or English, the accent comes in there. He never wanted me to have that; he always wanted me to have a clear accent, clear for Urdu and clear for English. So he very much emphasized me speaking Urdu with him, Memoni with my mother, and English at school."

Through Komal's description of her early family life and schooling in Pakistan, there emerged an incredible picture of her father's deliberate goals related to language practices and their influence on Komal. Everything related to language was carefully planned by him to achieve the highest level of literacy, in a very broad sense, for her. In his behavior, Richardson, Okun & Fisk's (1983) definition of literacy is clear: for Komal's father, reading and writing skills were clearly needed to support goals in particular contexts for transactional purposes. Although we might expect such direction for literacy to evolve in a fairly unselfconscious manner, from him we see a careful deliberation about language use that could only have come out of a careful analysis on his part. And it is also clear that these lessons in literacy and its place were not lost on Komal.

Komal mentioned that her brothers went to a more highly placed English school because "according to our culture, men should be more ready for the world. So he [father] was emphasizing more on the boys because they would be out in the world later." I suggested at this point that probably he didn't realize that she would be out in the world later. "Never, never!", she laughed. "They cannot even accept it now. Even yesterday I was talking to my mother [by phone] and she said, 'Yah, yah, you finish your education and come back. I don't want you to stay there.' They cannot accept, and it's very hard. It's not acceptable at any cost for them."

The cultural tight rope was clear when I pushed Komal a little to compare the reality of her current life with the ideal life her parents had raised her for. I could only imagine the juggling act it must take for her to maintain a social and cultural solidarity with her family while at the same time attempting to fit herself for a successful career in the secular culture of the United States.

In spite of the fact that Komal's father doesn't want her in the world, it was becoming clear to me that he had done many things to prepare her for just that. She explained later the reason for his training. "The idea behind it was, 'I don't know where you will get married, to which family, so wherever you go, you must adjust yourself.' That was the training and that was the idea. That idea was helpful here, but it wasn't training me for this environment, but for my in-laws."

Komal was not allowed to go to the university because it was co-educational and her father did not believe in that system for girls. So she enrolled in an English medium college for girls that was affiliated with the university. "You study in a girls' college, but whatever exam you're taking will be checked by the university. Then once you graduate, you will get a degree from the university. So I took admission in that college. That was very difficult to get into. I had to work very hard to get in because not many colleges over there were for girls. But I did a Bachelor's degree in microbiology." When I asked Komal if she'd had a job after college, she answered, "No, never. A job is not a way of life, you can't even think about it. Not because of the country, because there are many women there who work, but because of the family I belong to. There's no way." A year after her college graduation, she was married.

Komal showed a very clear understanding of the gender issues that faced her in Pakistan and in her family. The guidelines given to her as to what a woman could be allowed to do were very clear and very strict. And yet, within those guidelines, it seemed that her father had employed every measure to assure that she would get every opportunity for the highest level of literacy and education available to her.

Komal's husband was related to her family through a business partnership. Her husband's uncle was in business with her father. Because of the connection, she married her husband, and his sister married her uncle. She and her husband lived in Bangaladesh for a time and became the parents of two children, but he possessed a green card from the United States and decided to come here for six months and apply for citizenship. He brought his family to Houston. While they were away from Pakistan, trouble arose in the family business. His family pressured him to leave her. He told her that he needed to go home for a while and straighten out the problems, and then he would come back for her. She thought, "Okay, that sounds reasonable. I couldn't play any part. Being a woman, I didn't have any say. So I was here, and he went and never came back. He told my father, 'I don't want her or her children.' My father informed me here that he had left me. . . My husband was trying to pick up good things from both sides—citizenship here and a divorce in Pakistan, because in Pakistan I don't have any rights. Even according to Islam, the kids would go to him. If I went back to Pakistan, the law would give the children to him. I'm a woman, I'm divorced, and it's my fault. Default value." Her father wanted her to come home, but she told him, "How does it make sense for me to go back? At least I have some rights here."

Komal read the situation for herself very clearly here. She knew her place vis-a-vis divorce in the Pakistani culture and stated it to me very matter-of-factly: the divorce would be deemed her fault and she would lose her children. But her "literate know-how" (Brandt, 1990, p. 194) that came from the political sense her father had instilled in her showed itself, too. She was easily able to compare her lack of rights as a woman in Pakistan with the relative presence of at least "some rights" as an undocumented alien in the United States and took her next step accordingly.

Komal had a difficult time at first because she was on a visitor's visa and couldn't work, but she had two children to support. "It was very difficult for me because I had no relative in the whole United States." Her husband, however, had been abusive to her. She had had to seek medical help, so there were medical records. There were also several witnesses to various instances of abuse. She consulted several lawyers and finally found one who was aware of a new law recently passed by the Clinton administration, especially to protect women who were being abandoned in border states. Under this law, passed in September of 1994 and scheduled for implementation on January 1, 1995, if a woman could prove that she had been abused and that her husband had failed to apply for a green card for her, she would be allowed to apply for a green card for herself. "So then, under that law for battered women, I collected evidence, and by the fifth of January, 1995, I was the first person to apply under that law."

At this point I commented that she must have been very proud of herself for succeeding in such a complicated undertaking. She replied, " Yes, especially when I got it. It didn't come with a choice. It came, and I just had to do something. Before I knew about the law, I just felt very helpless. You can't go back, you can't be here. I just didn't know what to do. And even when I applied, the lawyer was not sure because I was the first. He didn't know what they would need. He said, 'Once I do this one, then I'll know, okay, they will need all this. At present I can just tell you what I think.'"

While she waited for the green card, Komal worked at odd jobs, at an Indian store, in a cafeteria, for people who knew her. She also did some telemarketing. After she got the green card, she worked for a travel agency for a year and a half and started going to a vocational school to become a certified phlebotomist. I asked her how she found school in this country. She answered, "I found my identity. I felt like I really got a chance of polishing my talents, and they don't really differentiate between men and women over here. The biggest difference was that I was studying in co-education. That was an issue all the time for my father. And I felt a little bit over-aged in that program (she was thirty at the time), as compared to when you go to a two-year school here and there are older students. In my country you don't go back to school, no matter what."

I brought up the subject of the cultural literacy that she needed at this point, knowledge of how the system works and how to make it work for you. "Yah", she answered, "how things can be done. I put it to discipline, how you discipline yourself according to the environment. That was basically the teaching of my father." "So", I said, "he was teaching you more than the literacy of language: he was teaching you the literacy of culture". She agreed, and added that he had encouraged her in many activities, one of which was auditioning and singing on television, something quite rare for girls in her country.

Once again I could see, and Komal assented to, the literate know how imparted to her by her father. And I could see again the attempts of her father to encourage her to go as far as she could within the gender constraints placed upon her by her society.

Komal got her green card in November of 1996 and her U.S. divorce in April of 1997. Then she went back to her country to live with her parents. "I found it difficult for me to settle there. . . I researched different work environments, but women are not looked on with good eyes there. . . I could have made a living for me and my children, but the environment affected me a lot. As a person, I wanted acceptance. I wanted people to respect me and not look down on me just because I was divorced." It didn't help that her father was a public figure and that her divorce was news. Also at that time, the Clinton administration passed another law stating that anyone with a green card who left the United States for more that six months would have the card cancelled. Her dream was to have her children study in the United States when they were older, and she knew that she would not be able to earn enough in Pakistan to afford that. So she had a decision to make.

"It was hard to think about the situation because I hadn't seen anyone in my country do it, and I couldn't get a guideline to follow the footsteps. It was all new, and nobody from my family knew the answers to my specific questions. Fear of the unknown was the big hurdle." She remembered having accidently tuned in to Dr. Laura one day during the last week that she was living in Houston. Dr. Laura was insisting that no matter what happened with parents, children should be provided with a stable home, whether in foster care or with other relatives, that they should not have to pay the price of divorce with a chaotic life. "The words of Dr. Laura were haunting me throughout my stay in Pakistan, and they finally struck me to make a decision." With Dr. Laura as her only counselor, Komal decided to leave her children with her parents and return to this country to save her green card and its benefits for the three of them.

Komal showed here not only her strategy of problem solving, but also that, like Indiana, Dell and James, she was able to take every little thing that she did know, every experience that she had, and apply it in the problem-solving strategy. When there was no help to be found in her present dilemma from her traditional sources, she latched on to information that she'd obtained serendipitously from an unlikely source to help her find a way out and preserve that which she saw as a benefit to herself and her children.

Komal settled first in Brooklyn, to go into business with a friend. After two weeks, she realized that it was "not for me." A doctor friend in the Bronx helped her to "research options." They decided that it would be good for her to get a degree in Health Information Management Systems. "I was looking for a short cut to obtain a reasonable living in the United States. The idea of getting education was that I had to be in this country five years to get citizenship. What's the point of being here five years, doing nothing, working at McDonald's or something? So I thought in those five years I can accomplish some education, which will be beneficial for me to provide better for my family. In America there are only two ways of survival: be very, very rich, lots of money or you need to be educated. I couldn't be rich here at present, but education I could do, so I just broke it out into options, how I could do it."

Analytic problem solving was at work here again. When the business with her friend didn't work out, Komal found another collaborator to help her "research options." Cavaliere (1997) would call this "failure as feedback" (p. 11): when one avenue is closed, take the experience for what it is and choose the next step. Komal's analysis of how to make it in the U. S. is the common one that we hear from students: if you aren't born rich, you need to be educated. "...so I just broke it out into options," she said, "how I could do it." No "if" here, just "how", which demonstrated the kind of self-efficacy and mastery orientation (described by Kalsner, 1992) that Komal possessed.

Komal took a job at a pharmaceutical laboratory in my suburban county, and since my community college was the nearest school that had the program she wanted, she enrolled here. I asked her how this new learning environment was for her. "It was a difficult thing. First of all, it was hard to understand the system. Everything sounded French to me, and I just couldn't understand it. I kept struggling, asking questions, finding out, and finally figured it out." I asked if she felt discouraged at first, if she felt like she couldn't do it. "Yah," she said. "I was one hundred percent sure I'm going to fail the placement testing. To my surprise, I passed, in fact on a second semester level. It was unbelievable! I thought their system is not working right. They made a mistake, but I'm not telling anybody," she laughed.

At the community college, everything "sounded French" to Komal. This could be pretty intimidating, I thought, for someone whose languages were Urdu, English, Memoni, and Sindhi. She was convinced that she would fail her placement tests, but she took them anyway. She "kept struggling, asking question, finding out, and finally figured it out." She kept problem solving. Difficulty and fear produced problem solving.

The reading and writing required of her at the community college were not difficult, except for one textbook in a management class. She went to the teacher and said, "I'm reading it, but I'm not getting it. I'm going to fail; what do I do?" She did indeed fail the first test. The teacher explained that the book was difficult even for American students, and that the class average was failing. But he also figured out that, because his tests were open-book, part of her problem was the speed with which she could read. "It was an open book exam", she explained. "You have to know where the answer is, real fast. So I did only ten questions out of thirty, and the other students were done. So the teacher told me about the testing center, where you can take your time. I used to go down there and stay five hours for one test. And I graded A."

Again, failure led Komal to invent a problem solving strategy. Her first step was to turn to the teacher, and in this case the teacher joined her in the problem solving, helping her to figure out, as James suggested earlier, why the task was so hard for her. The solution of using the testing center was hypothesized, tested, and proved successful. Given a piece of information that she didn't have before (that a testing center existed), once again Komal exemplified "failure as feedback" (Cavaliere, 1997, p. 11).

I asked Komal what had been her greatest obstacles so far. "Not many, because I feel that the system over here has clicked with my nature. When I talked to the teacher, he was accommodating, which you don't get in Pakistan. There it's up to you; this is it; there's a lot of pressure. I feel more encouraged here." Being close to the teacher, having the teacher accessible like this, is important to Komal. She sometimes has used the college's counseling service to help her relate to teachers that she felt were being uncooperative. "There was one without eye contact. I felt like he was ignoring me. I was ready to leave. I want to have a relationship with the teacher. If the teacher is unwilling to meet me after class, answer my questions. . . Before a test I have a full page of my questions, and you need to be there to tell me what's wrong. Sometimes I have to ask how to prepare for a test. Sometimes they look at me like they're thinking, 'Oh, God, what is that?'" On the other hand, she described one biology teacher who helped her prepare for a test by starting with step one, opening the book, and every step thereafter. "'Then everything will fall in place,' the teacher said. 'This is the system.' It made me understand how it would work. The way I study, if you tell me this is important, I will not leave one paragraph, because that's how I study; that's what I'm here for."

Like Sarah, Komal had definite things to say about what teachers should be and do. She was willing to do her part (. . . if you tell me this is important, I will not leave one paragraph. . . "), but she needed teachers to do theirs equally ("I want to have a relationship with the teacher.") The relationship helped her learning, and the lack of it interfered.

At this point in the interview, Komal took a little aside to describe an experience that she had at the community college that gave her the feeling of acceptance. "I had my final biology practical exam which was held in the Science Learning Center. I saw a notice on the wall: 'Your mother does not work here, and she will not pick up after you.' I was so upset to read this notice all over the lab. It was my first semester, and I could not understand where to go. So I went to my counselor on campus and expressed my concern and anger to her regarding this comment. Mother is a very special person in my culture. We don't want her to be insulted with such comments as who works here and picks up things after me. Even if she does, you don't advertise it in this insulting manner. The counselor was very cooperative. She listened and let me express myself. Later on she made sure that those notices were removed, so I felt my voice was heard."

Voice—a topic that came up in my interviews with other pilgrims. This experience with the signs in the science lab offended Komal on a cultural level. Here was another problem that needed to be solved. Although she had done her best to be a good student, to meet the demands of the institution, to accommodate herself to a new context, here was something so fundamentally insulting as far as she was concerned that it must change. Once again, even though at first she "could not understand where to go," she ultimately made her way to the counselor that she trusted and succeeded in getting the offensive signs removed. "So I felt my voice was heard," she said. How much more clearly could she tell me that her problem solving and her use of her new literacy of the institution had had the purpose and the effect of giving her a voice (Stein, 1995)?

Did she ever turn to other students for help when her studies were difficult, I asked? "Yah, but usually I become their help. So basically I look to the teacher, tutors, videos. Students at this age have their own responsibilities, and I feel they're not reliable. American students are with you one semester, and the next semester they don't know you, don't even look at you. They're not there when I need them." I gathered that Komal had tried to use other students as a resource sometimes, but that that strategy had failed, so she took that avenue off her list of strategies, another sign or her pragmatism.

I heard a love of learning as Komal explained her need for a good relationship with her teachers. I asked her if, beyond the economic need that she had, she also found a high value in the learning itself. Her answer struck me as terribly honest. "Superficial problems come first at the time. Learning is important, but it's not a priority now. Right now you are down in economics; your main aim is to support your children, so you will put that first. How do I get that done? But learning comes with it. It will be beneficial, but not a priority. Living with my father, learning was a priority. Money was not an issue. Now money is an issue. My children are a priority; I don't care about the learning. But with the economic issue, if that can be done by learning, it's two benefits on one thing. Learning will make me get out of stress, and I can discover myself. As much as I've discovered myself, seen myself in the weaknesses and in the strengths, I think I did all that here at this school. I never knew myself the way I was taught here in so many workshops, never had any idea, through the abuse, the divorce, the problems with my children." She took what she found here and used it for her own self-awareness.

Two issues emerged in this portion of the interview. First of all, Komal was quite clear about the source of her motivation. It is mainly an economic one (extrinsic) at this point in her life. She can remember a time when it was intrinsic, learning for its own sake, but that was at a time when she was not "down in economics". For her, "superficial problems come first", and the one she has to deal with now is the issue of supporting herself and her children. I sensed, however, when she said, ". . . if that can be done by learning, it's two benefits on one thing. . . ", that the intrinsic motivation still lurks within her, just below her pragmatic surface.

The other piece that Komal brought forward here was the value of the developmental nature of the community college to her. "I never knew myself the way I was taught here. . . I think I did all that here at this school." The self-knowledge that she has gained has probably added to her deftness at problem solving which has in turn enabled her to increase her literacy.

As the interview began to wind down, I told Komal that I had noticed in many of my participants a practice of giving back to those around them. I mentioned her activities with the food bank and the Muslim Club. About this she said, "It all goes back to my father. Networking is important in politics. . . So over here, people know me when I'm coming around. I can say hello to so many people when I'm walking in the corridor. They know me, so that was also from him. . . I didn't have the idea that I'm doing that." This habit of hers was brought to her attention recently by the other members of the

Muslim Club. They were surprised that when they walked around campus with her, she seemed to know everybody. And she made a habit of introducing the other club members to everyone she knew. "It's just giving them recognition," she said, "that they're not nobody. My father always did this when I was with him. Now after three semesters, when they walk with me, I see them saying 'Hi' to so many people, so I see you can learn."

Komal, like all the other pilgrims described so far, exhibits the trait of giving back what she has gained, sharing her knowledge of the community with the more reserved students in the Muslim Club in a kind of social and cultural solidarity that attempts to remind them that they are "not nobody."

This social networking is obviously important to Komal, and also obviously one of her strengths. Later she said, " I only go to the director, the source, the person who can make a change. Here the directors are usually accessible and willing to listen. I know how to take a stand when I'm right." These words revealed to me the increased self esteem and self-determination that Lytle & Wolfe (1989) describe as one of the effects of increased literacy.

Since Komal's approach to problem solving was apparent all through the interview, I asked her talk about it from her own perspective. "The Friday prayer room was a big achievement. The vice-president of the Muslim Club was afraid of having the club students pray on campus. What would people say? Now he's all over campus saying, 'I can do this.' I feel so great. Even if I can make a difference in one person's life, I mean we have seventy-five members now and we started with only two. So everybody knows us, the county, the mosque. . . We went to the community center for the first time last week. They had heard about us and were greeting us by name. You can make a difference; you can do it." Komal's next project is to get Muslim food (Halal) in the cafeteria.

Once again, Komal told me through these words that part of her growth in the broad aspects of literacy must be the act of passing it on to others. This sharing seems to come almost instinctively as she progresses. I saw in her statements here, also, the same kind of positive, can-do spirit that many of the other pilgrims demonstrated. Like Indiana's writing tasks, each of Komal's social projects seems to lead to the next, and I was reminded of Stein's (1995) "bridge to the future" (p. 64) purpose for literacy.

Komal attended a recent Town Meeting on the campus, where students get to speak their concerns directly to the college president and several of his high-level administrators. About this meeting she said, "Everyone was getting up and talking. I thought to myself, 'What am I doing sitting?' So I just got up. I had nothing to lose. The college, the system the way it is, gives us a chance. There is an ocean of knowledge here; it's just on us how to drink." Although Komal has transferred to a medical college now for her four-year degree, she still takes one course at this community college. "I don't want to leave," she said.

This "nothing to lose" attitude seemed to be emerging as a factor in my thinking about the effects of literacy, a kind of willingness to take a chance in spite of possible failure. Indiana showed it, as well and James and Dell. I decided that this notion was a thread worth picking up in greater depth in my later discussion chapter. Komal paid a fine tribute to the value of the community college enterprise here, too.

As I mentioned in Chapter Three, part of my study design involved sharing my write-ups of the interviews with the individual participants for feedback. Although James had suggested a small clarification in his remarks about Brahms and Beethoven, which I incorporated, most of the others had no suggestions for changes and for the most part were quite enthusiastic about my representations of them.

Komal's response, on the contrary, was literally another story. She returned her copy of the draft to me with many small editorial changes, and she used the backs of several pages to include new anecdotes and details that she thought would make the picture more clear. She appended two other pieces of her writing, an article published in the returning adults' newsletter entitled "Reflections of a Returning Adult Student", and a paper prepared for one of her current courses explaining her career choice and how she made it. She hoped that these additions might clarify or buttress some of the points she had made in the interview. She even corrected my grammar and typos!

I can only begin to express the volumes that these feedback efforts spoke to me. They showed me her strong self-esteem, her high level of literacy about the conventions of formal academic writing, her understanding of the role of an editor, all these things. But mostly I was thrilled that she had internalized the role of co-researcher so thoroughly that she was behaving like a marvelous collaborator. Amazing.

The template of issues that I have chosen to highlight for this study fits Komal's literacy pilgrimage in several ways. In terms of Richardson, Okun & Fisk's (1983) definition of literacy, Komal's pragmatic political training comes into play. Each new piece of literacy that she gained was employed to achieve a goal that she created for herself. When she wanted to stay in this country as an independent woman, she used the literacy of networking that she had learned from her father to find lawyers, witnesses and evidence to equip herself to gain green card status under the new law. When she needed to solve the problem of who should take care of her children while she maintained her green card status, she used what she had learned from Dr. Laura. When cultural issues arose for her at the community college, she used the new resource of the counseling service, which reinforced a new sense of voice, which in turn led to more literacy practices. I saw a great comparison here between her employing every scrap of knowledge and skill that she had to pursue her goals and Indiana's statement that "everything is being used in a positive fashion,' and, one might add, in a transactional way.

Like Sarah's, Komal's period of prolonged tension and turning point (from Fingeret & Drennon's spiral model) are a little more difficult to pinpoint than they were for James, Dell and Indiana, perhaps because, also like Sarah, Komal had been on the literacy path from childhood. I would have to speculate, though, that a period of prolonged tension did probably occur when she was stranded in Houston all alone with her children. She seemed to speak this tension when she said," You can't go back; you can't be here; I just didn't know what to do." And the turning point seemed to follow, when she sought and won her own green card. There followed the other phases of the spiral model: seeking educational opportunities (initially the phlebotomist certification program), changing relationships and practices (going against the advice of her parents and returning to this country to create her own path), and intensive continuing interaction (entering the community college, creating the Muslim Club, and moving on to a four-year school).

For Komal, the purposes for her literacy seem to cover all the bases named by Stein (1995) and Fingeret & Drennon (1997). First of all, although she never stated it in so many words as the other (particularly the male) pilgrims did, by her action in returning to this country Komal showed her intended purpose of changing her life (Fingeret & Drennon, 1997). This was not a complete change, obviously, as she has held on to the traditional dress, rituals and social community of the Pakistani Muslim woman. She also plans to enroll her children in a tradition Muslim school in Staten Island when they join her. But she did initiate a change of setting, to one where she could have "some rights", where "they don't differentiate between men and women" in educational sites, and where "the system…has clicked with my nature." So the change in her life that she sought was less a change in herself as a person and more a change in the background conditions that would permit this person to thrive. Additionally, Komal showed me that her purposes include the desire for access (to a U. S. career), the need for a voice (in the incident with the lab signs and her attendance at the town meeting), the need for independence (particularly economic independence), and a bridge to the future, not only her future, but that of her children.

I discussed Komal's kind of motivation earlier, but to recap, I saw definitely at this time an extrinsic motivation as primary for her, particularly related to her own economic situation. But this extrinsic motivation was clearly entwined with an intrinsic one. I sensed that she viewed as a blessing the fact that her road to economic salvation also involved learning, the thing that she loves to do. Komal did not really betray being motivated by a desire to fit in (Delattre, 1983; Fingeret, 1997), and yet a certain measure of fitting in is implied in the political and networking approach to life situations that she gained from her father.

The community college has obviously played a huge role in Komal's progress on her path to higher literacy. Not only has its privileging of pedagogy been an asset to her (think of the teacher that referred her to the testing center and the one who showed her how to prepare for a test as examples), but also the developmental services available to her (counseling, self-development workshops) seem to have been invaluable. She revealed the community college's value to her when she explained that, even though she's now enrolled full-time in a four-year school, she continues to take one class at the community college. "I don't want to leave," she said.

Like Sarah, Komal did not really talk about the unthinkableness of turning back the way the male pilgrims did. This gap for her could perhaps be attributed, as I felt it was with Sarah, to the fact that she has always been on a literacy path and can imagine no other, while the men clearly can and know well what a nightmare the lack of it can be. But, as with all the other pilgrims, there is in Komal's story the giving back, the sharing of what has been learned, like a pioneer creating maps for others.

CHAPTER IX

"THERE IS STILL A PLACE FOR ME."

The pilgrims that we've met so far each had one main obstacle to overcome as they sought to advance themselves. Dell and James were dealing with learning disabilities, Sarah and Komal mostly cultural differences, and Indiana, a brain injury. Not all those who come to the community college, though, find their difficulties thus limited. Some have combinations of obstacles that taken individually are difficult enough, but when combined can be almost overwhelming. Sid is such a person. Her story is much more difficult to unpack and categorize than those of the other pilgrims. The complexity of it resists the clear labeling and theorizing that were more or less possible with the others. The overriding themes in the story, however, were about access and voice.

Sid arrived at my school about three years ago, and one of her first classes was my freshman composition class that had an extra hour a week in the writing center. She spoke to me right away about her dyslexia and asked for extra time to do in-class writing. This request is a common one here, as it seems that more and more learning disabled students are finding their way to the community college. When Sid turned in her papers, I read some of the most interesting writing that I've ever seen. She wrote about her ambivalence about her own culture, a narrative of the Northridge Earthquake which she'd experienced first-hand, and a sociological study of topless dancers that she'd worked with. Only much later would I find out about the pain that Sid had endured to make her way to literacy.

Sid's whole primary and secondary education exemplified a period of prolonged tension (Fingeret & Drennon, 1997). She began her education at a Catholic school, and, as she tells it, she began learning letters and reading with everyone else. She didn't notice a problem, but the teachers did. Instead of trying to figure it out, they just said, "She's not doing this right; she's slow". She was put in a slow class and, according to Sid, "it was just the end of it. I was just in a slow class, and they really didn't pay much attention to me." She felt as if there was definitely something wrong with her, and the other students treated her differently because she wasn't "up to speed". The result was that for the three years she was in that school, she just felt inadequate.

Her learning difficulty was exacerbated by the fact that she was Puerto Rican. "I always felt stupid, because of my culture, my race, there weren't many Hispanics; they really disregarded. . . disregarded me, and I felt that I wasn't anything significant there." Later in the interview she explained that this school was in a predominantly Irish Catholic area, and that she and her sister and two other students were the only Hispanics. "I don't think they even realized at first that she was my sister, because she had red hair, freckles, very pale skin; nobody associated us. But when she saw kids picking on me, she used to come to my defense, and when they realized we were sisters, the one nun used to beat her up and pull her braids just because she was my sister. One nun used to tell me that my family came from pigs, and we brought cockroaches here and stuff like that; in front of the whole classroom she would say this, and she would humiliate me." I suggested at this point that she must have hated school, and she answered, "Oh, yeah, I hated it, yeah. I did hate it."

This double whammy of dyslexia and cultural discrimination seemed a heavy load for one little girl to carry, I suggested. Sid replied, "After having a shot like the incapability to read and write the way other kids did, and then having a negative experience about being Latino, I just felt like the Ugly Duckling, the oddball that nobody wanted. If I had had the positive feeling that I can read and write, and I have a brain and I'm smart, I could get beyond it because there'd be other qualities about me beyond just being Hispanic."

How much more clearly could Sid have described her anguish as an outsider (Delattre, 1983; Fingeret & Drennon, 1997)? She was different because of ethnicity and different because of capability, and there seemed to be no door she could go through to get to the inside. I had not realized at the start of this interview just how heart-breaking her story of experiences in private and public schools actually were, or how she found the strength to overcome them. I marveled at the fact that from these beginnings she would eventually reach the point of running for public office.

How did her parents relate to this school situation of hers, I wondered. "My parents thought I wasn't applying myself," she said. "I would sit there and read a paragraph and be exhausted by the time I got to the end, almost falling asleep it tired me out so, and they really felt I wasn't applying myself, and I used to really get hit. I just couldn't process it fast enough, and I was like, 'I don't get it'. So that really gave me a lot. . . I had stress in school and at home just from trying to keep up with what everyone said I had to keep up with, at least average." I was reminded of the chapter from Mike Rose's Lives on the Boundary, entitled "I Just Wanna Be Average". Being average would have been a blessing, the end of the rainbow, for Sid during her early school years. Think of the pressure that it would have removed from her. And yet, perhaps the struggle of not being average was partial fuel for her drive to excel later.

For fourth grade, Sid was enrolled in the public school and things got somewhat better for her, at least socially. There was a diversity in the student body that had been absent in the Catholic school, Black, Italian, other Hispanics, Jewish kids. "I started getting exposed to all these other people, and I didn't feel like I was so different," she said. A girl from her neighborhood introduced her to everyone, and they all made "the new girl" feel welcome. "I felt really accepted by everybody, rather than being an outcast all the time, having to play with the one other kid who was an outcast." Sid stopped to laugh at this remembered picture, the first of much laughter and tears that would take place during the interview. "I was widely accepted by everybody, and that was a real confidence booster for me."

Academically, however, the public school was not too much better for Sid. She started out in an average reading group, but was soon changed to a slower one. The teacher there recognized that she was having problems. She remembers, "I was trying to read the word 'skirt', and I was starting with the last letter in the word, going 't-, t-, t-'. The teacher said, 'What are you seeing? What are you seeing? The word starts with this.' And she wrote the 'sk', and I said, 'I know, but I'm picking up this first mentally.' And she said, 'I think this is that problem that we heard about.'" The teachers realized the nature of the problem, and they put Sid in a class that focused on trying to correct it, but nothing really did much good. As Sid put it, "They just didn't know how to treat it. They sent me to the school psychologist. I took IQ tests, and they said, 'You know, she's a brilliant girl, but she's having a real big problem with her reading and her numbers.'"

Doing well on the IQ test didn't help Sid's self-image very much. "I still didn't understand the concept of an IQ test. I knew I took it, and I did the best I could, gave my best educated answers, and I felt okay knowing that I passed this test, but in school I was still not doing good, still kinda stupid." So, even though a certain amount of social insider status had come her way (Brandt, 1990), the tension continued in regard to academics.

Things did get somewhat better on the homefront, however. Sid's mother met with the new teachers and began to understand that there was a reading problem. "She tried to work with me, but she couldn't stand working with me; it was so frustrating. To sit and listen to your child not be able to read was just. . . She would fall asleep." We both laughed at this point in the interview. "Yeah, she'd fall asleep, and I'd say, 'Come on! You're supposed to help me!'" So her mother tried to help, but her father had trouble accepting "the fact that I had such a disability." As she explains his feelings, she says, "My other two sisters were so much more intelligent than I was and did so well in school, and I couldn't even be an average student, so he had problems with it."

Things did not improve once Sid got to high school. "They were giving us chapters to read, and I was thinking, 'Chapters?'" She laughed hysterically at this. "How about a couple of pages?" Everything took her a long time to process. She used social studies as an example, with its vocabulary, and definitions, and information, and concepts. She couldn't keep up. "I did well at the beginning of each semester, and then the further it went on, I'd start looking out the window because I'd be lost and start drifting. I just couldn't. . . I was drowning." Eventually there was a tutor who came to her house, but, according to Sid, "it wasn't enough" because it didn't focus on her reading problems. Like Dell, Sid was told by her guidance counselor that she might be better off seeking out a trade school program, and that she should "try to do something with your hands" because she was not "college material." So, on the advice of those whose opinion she trusted, she dropped out of school just before graduation and got a job waitressing at a senior center.

Next Sid moved on to hairdressing school, which was hard, too, because of the reading involved, and she opened a nail salon, "because it was a hands-on thing; I could do it with my hands, you know. I had such a low self-esteem as far as myself intellectually on a scholastic level, I didn't even venture to go there. This is what I can do. This is the best I can do." Sid was still acting on the advice that had been given her in high school.

I asked Sid at this point whether she really accepted the fact that this was the best she could do. She said, "I did for a while. I accepted it, but I was still mad. This isn't fair. There's gotta be something. I want to try it." She laughed. "And I didn't graduate, and I felt really bad (by this point Sid was sobbing) because I didn't graduate with all my friends. I heard about graduation, but I didn't go, you know." The sobbing continued for several minutes, with not a Kleenex to be found in my office. I felt terrible for stirring up such painful memories for Sid. I found myself saying, "Oh, Sid, I didn't want this to be hard for you. I wanted it to be a celebration." We were both crying and laughing together by now, laughing at ourselves crying, really, and she finally said, "It's always hard to think about."

For Sid at this point, the "internal force" (Wlodkowski, 1985) that made her say, "There's gotta be something", was being completely thwarted by the situation she saw herself in. She had been given no tools for problem solving that might have helped her find a way to reach a goal that she wanted.

This one sad remembrance triggered her to talk about two others. She had made a friend during the summer before high school. “We made friends because we got along, but she was brilliant, she was so smart, and she used to try to help me.” But there was tracking in her high school; the smarter kids took different courses, like foreign languages, “where I wasn’t up to speed”, and they began to drift apart. Sid expects that the cause was peer pressure from the other smart kids who probably said to her friend, “Why are you hanging out with her? That girl doesn’t have a brain.” This story was almost too much for me by itself, but right on its heels came another one. It happened in junior high, when the class was going on a trip to the city to see A Midsummer Night’s Dream. Students were chosen to go. As Sid told me, “The teacher was really blunt about it, and she said, ‘Some of you won’t be going because you wouldn’t be able to understand the concept and wouldn’t be able to understand the language and the play.’ And then I found out that I was one of those students. . .” Here great sobbing took place. “And I missed out on seeing a really terrific play. They didn’t think I was smart enough. All these things that I remembered affected me; they kept it in the forefront of my mind that I didn’t have the capability to do that. . .”

Even though Sid had found a certain insider place for herself socially, she remained an outsider academically and was excluded from a discourse community that had great appeal for her. So the prolonged tension got even longer. Accepting the alternative to getting an education came hard for Sid. “I got rebellious,” she said. “I thought, ‘I don’t want to be a manicurist for the rest of my life, or a hairdresser.’” Like

James, Sid turned to music. She learned to play bass by ear and started writing music. She watched her sister go to college and come home because it was too boring, and all she could think was, "I'd like to see what it's like."

Sid formed a band, and it became moderately successful, travelling through New York, Canada, the whole east coast, and as far west as Memphis. I asked her what kind of music they played, and she said it was Thrash. I didn't want to blow the momentum of the interview by asking her just what that was, so later I asked my son. When he explained that it was a kind of loud, angry, heavy metal/punk style, I could only think to myself, "How perfectly appropriate".

About the band, Sid said, "I was satisfied. We almost got a record deal. I'm a legend in my own mind," she laughed. When the band ended, she found herself in California. I remembered her writing about becoming more accepting of her Hispanic culture when she lived there, and I asked her to talk about that. She remembered that as a child, in a neighborhood with few Hispanics, she used to walk through the streets with her grandfather, and he would speak Spanish to her and people would notice. "It wasn't a big deal," she said, that is, not until she started hearing bigoted comments. "You start to clam up then, not really want to acknowledge it, hide that." She said that people used to call her mother Cat Woman because of her black hair and eyebrows. "My mom looked very Latin, and they weren't familiar with seeing women look like that, and I used to hate when she used to come to school." I remembered that she had written about asking her mother not to cook rice and beans when her friends came over. She laughed and said, "Yeah, and I'd go to school stinking of garlic all the time, and everybody said, 'What's that smell, Sid?' and I didn't notice anything." Sid was very clear in her memory of these outsider feelings.

During the band years, however, Sid had moved to northern New Jersey. "I went shopping there, and I never realized that there were so many Hispanic people. All these people speaking Spanish, and Spanish signs, and I thought, 'Wow, I'm not the only one in the world like this.' I'd felt so isolated for so long." When she later settled in Hollywood, she found the same situation, and began to "stumble through Spanish" and feel okay. "I started to let my hair down and not feel ashamed of who I was," she said. This hair reference is an important one to me, because since I've known her, I've watched Sid come to school with her wonderful long curly hair blow-dried into straightness whenever there was an important occasion; and I've heard her apologize on several occasions when she didn't have time for the blow-drying.

Sid went on to remember that when she was younger, if someone inquired about her heritage, she would just laugh and say, "Oh, I'm a lot of things." Now, in California, she wasn't afraid to say, "'I'm Latino; I'm Puerto Rican.' It wasn't a big deal, and I felt good about it. I could make rice and beans."

One might say that in the absence of the ability to read printed texts, Sid had instead learned to read the culture around her. It was easy for her to articulate her take on different environments and her place in them. As her experiences widened, she was able to see who she was and feel "good". This self-knowledge gained through reading the world probably prepared her for her later endeavors.

Thoughts of college were never far from Sid's mind; "I wanted to for such a long time, but it was always something I put aside." And she kept putting it aside until she was hit with the triple whammy: "I was in bad shape financially; I'd had a child, and I wasn't married, and I had to go apply for social services." In her mind, her life had taken a really bad turn. However, her cousin explained to her that women on social services assistance could get help in continuing their education. "She really opened up that venue, that vision for me. I could get my GED, and I could go to college, and I could get a degree, and I could do something with myself."

Sid put off taking the placement testing for the community college. She ended up taking it just before the fall semester started. She did it, and then assumed that "I failed miserably, and I would get a notice saying, 'You failed.'" Like Komal, she couldn't believe it when she found out she had passed, meaning that she could enter a regular composition class with an extra hour of writing center reinforcement. "I was trembling. I didn't have the foggiest. That meant that in half a week I was going to start school." She was assigned a student advisor to help her choose classes and register. "Things have really changed. I've been out of this for a long time," she thought.

Sid found out about services for the learning disabled and learned that she was entitled to get her textbooks and reading materials on tape. "The problem for me was that it took $75.00 to enroll, and I had to get all these documents that proved you were dyslexic. But I pulled it all together and got my books on tape, which really helped me. I mean, listening was the easiest way for me, and writing at the same time. I had to hear and write it. That was my biggest help for my success in school, and it was really great to see my first 'A'." This simple tool, books on tape, helped Sid solve her problem with reading. When she could handle her reading this way, she gained the reinforcement

(Wlodkowski, 1985) of good grades that could help her achieve her goal, finally, of an education.

My class was the first one Sid attended when she entered the community college three years ago. It was, as she put it, "eye-opening." She elaborated by saying, "All these different people of different ages. I felt better, more comfortable; it was more inviting. I thought, 'This is about who you are and what you have to offer and how much you want to put into it.' It almost enabled me to rise above my problems and work harder." I remarked that I noticed that writing took her longer, but that she had such great things to say, and the minor dyslexic errors never seemed to take away from her meaning. I asked whether she had enjoyed the writing. "I really did," she answered. "The most positive thing in my life was getting my experiences out on paper and learning how to do it better. I had so much to say, and I cared about how it was delivered. It made me want to learn more. It focused me on my mind and who I was and what I could do. That empowered me more. It was my driving force in everything else." Sid sounded like Indiana here. Writing had become the means by which she can move forward, not only in skills, but also in self-knowledge.

I always use a multicultural reader in my composition classes, and Sid had found this reading quite liberating. "The stories made me want to keep going. There was such diversity, everybody's culture. It was easy to do the writing assignments because everybody in the class could identify with some story and say, 'This is about me; I've been here.'" She reminded me of several other students in the class who were struggling with issues of culture, and how they wrote and talked about it.

Thinking of the other pilgrims, I asked Sid whether there had been obstacles in the course of her college career, things that had made her want to give up. Interestingly, the things that she named were not of a cognitive or academic nature, but issues relating to "the outside elements, my living, my situation with finances." Included in the problems was her relationship with the Department of Social Services. "I wanted to get my college degree, even if it was only a two-year degree, and get the hell off social services, because I didn't want to look at those people any more." Once again, anger was a big motivator for Sid.

As the months went on, Sid dealt with the outside issues and thrived in school. I knew that sometimes the tapes didn't come on time, meaning that she would have to spend many extra hours looking at a reading assignment one line at a time to keep up, but by the end of her third semester of full-time enrollment, her grade point average was 3.8. Then came another blow: welfare reform. As Sid explained it, "I got the letter and started to lose my mind. It was going to affect my eligibility to stay in school. I read it over and over again to see if there was anything I was missing. Oh, my God. This is all I have. This is my future. If I don't do this, I have nothing." In this terrified state of mind, Sid went to the county welfare office. She told them, "I'm in school now. You can't just pull me out to start WEP work or job training." She explained to them that she was going to get a degree, but they didn't care. An associate's degree in liberal arts didn't qualify in this new welfare-to-work scenario. Once again Sid's anger kicked in as a motivator.

Sid realized that she was probably not the only community college student who was affected by this new legislation, so she started putting up flyers around the school to try to mobilize others. "Hangin' these flyers up," she laughed, "making sure no one was in the halls seeing who was hanging them. It was a shameful thing. I was buying my groceries with food stamps. This public assistance was helping me live." Only one other young mother was able to overcome the stigma of being on public assistance and come forward. She was a young Haitian woman who had received political asylum here when Aristide's government fell, another whole story in herself. Together they tried to find a solution. "We each had a child. We knew that education was the only way we were going to pull ourselves out of the hole we were in."

Sid began networking through the Internet. She found groups and organizations that were mobilizing against parts of this new legislation. She got in touch with the Welfare Warriors on Long Island, and they were "amazing". She ended up lobbying the governor's office in Albany and speaking on a panel organized by Hostos Community College that was held in Westchester County, "to show the face of a welfare mom trying to get an education. I hung my face on a poster so people could see what it was like for people like myself who were trying to change their life through education."

This was the first time that Sid had said in so many words that her main purpose for seeking literacy and education was to change her life (Fingeret & Drennon, 1997). Although one could read this message between the lines in other things she had said, it seemed to me that being able to articulate it in this way clearly demonstrated how far Sid had come, not only in terms of literacy, but also in terms of the self-esteem that increased literacy can engender (Lytle & Wolf, 1989).

After this large county meeting, with legislators present to hear concerns, Sid decided that there needed to be such a meeting in her own county, "to let our elected officials know that there are people like me, and there has to be something we can do to change this law and keep these students in school." Sid came to me with her idea, but neither of us had a clue about how to organize such a forum. I gave her the number of the local chapter of the National Organization for Women that I thought might help her. Sid demonstrated her "literate know-how" (Brandt, 1990) here, taking her experience in one situation and transferring it to another.

The meeting came off about a month later, complete with speakers, including members of community grass roots organizations, the welfare department chief, and even the County Executive, with county and state legislators in the audience. Organizing it had taken much reading and letter-writing on Sid's part. Later, the president of NOW told me that in all her years she had never seen anyone exhibit the organizational skills that Sid had shown. She was saying this about a slight, profoundly dyslexic, Puerto Rican welfare mother who had received her GED only a few months before. It seemed to me that in this achievement, Sid had demonstrated Richardson, Okun & Fisk's definition of literacy: "The use of reading and writing as operations in service of a goal to accomplish transactions within a given context" (p. 4).

Sid's reflection of the meeting was as follows: "You came; you saw. I don't know how much impact it had. I like to believe that it turned some heads to look at the situation. Although it couldn't fix everybody's problem, with the work of other organizations in the state, we were able to make that six to twelve months of job training into twenty-four; we applied enough pressure that they allowed students to stay and complete degrees and finish programs."

One of the by-products of the welfare forum was that Sid was approached to run for the county legislature on a kind of poor people's platform. "Again I was a sacrificial lamb," she said. "I didn't have a snowball's chance of winning the election. Mine is basically a Republican area where people didn't care about those on welfare. They wanted to get rid of that part of government altogether. I knew I was going to die a bloody death in the election, but I thought, 'Just let me win the primary'. And I did. I beat a guy who had held the seat for twenty-six years by two votes. That was a feather in my cap. I got my word out enough." The fact that she used the word "word" was not lost on me.

During the course of Sid's fight with the welfare department, who, she felt, were not giving her all the services she was entitled to, she turned to the local Legal Aid office. There she learned that they would not take any cases against the DSS because much of their funding was dependent on the county. Bewildered, Sid turned to legal aid in Manhattan. "I found services there to protect me," she said. "A lawyer there wrote up all the violations that Rockland County had committed against me. I saw this and figured, 'I want to do what this guy does.' I still want to work for an organization like that, a not-for-profit where you can go to sleep at night feeling good that you've helped somebody keep the roof over their head. That would be the reward." In these efforts that she made to seek legal help, I saw a literacy at work that led to problem solving and then even more literacy.

Sid had talked to me about her dream to be a lawyer ever since I'd known her. I asked her at that point in the interview whether this dream still lived. She answered rather tentatively that it did. I knew that she had been discouraged about it at one point when a member of the psychology faculty here had flatly told her that she could never do law school with her profound dyslexia. Our conversation involved some general thoughts about how she reacts to obstacles. "I think my first response to a brick wall is to feel disappointed, but then I get angry," she said. "My anger makes me see past everything. 'No! No! You're not going to do this to me! There's some other way around this, and I'm gonna find it, because you're not standing in my way.'" Sid explained that she was not going to settle for doing something with her hands. She had worked her way from manicurist to musician and back to the books ("the real thing in life") and didn't give up. "Even if I let it sit for a while, I'll go back at it. When it comes to a system trying to take my right as a human being away, that makes me angry even more and keeps me fighting to get over it and go (she stuck her tongue out at this point)... Stick my tongue out and say, "See, I did it." (I heard Carly Simon recently refer to this attitude as "warrior mode".) I thought of one of the other of the pilgrims here, Indiana, scaling the Palisade Cliffs with his hook.

So, as one typical of all the pilgrims in my study, she found a way to fight back against the psychologist's pronouncement. Again, she proved to be a creative problem-solver. She decided to test his advice by serving as an intern at Legal Aid in Manhattan for the summer. "It was the best things I've ever done, looking up laws and knowing there are things out there to help people. I felt really good about it. I love the law now." And she was reasonably competent at it, too, she had told me at the time. It took her longer to prepare case research than some of the others, but she was also more thorough.

Remembering how Indiana's advancing literacy had caused him to want to share it with his daughters, I asked Sid what she wanted for her children (there are two now). "I want my kids to know never to be afraid to ask questions," she said. "If you don't understand something, open up your mouth and don't be afraid. A stupid person is the person who keeps their mouth shut. I was like that for a long time. (Here Sid began to cry again.) Another hard part. . .," she said and continued crying while she explained. "Because I always felt so stupid, I never asked why because I didn't want to look stupid again. I pretended I understood. I lost out so much for keeping my mouth shut. I just didn't want to seem like an idiot again. I wanted somebody to think that I had some kind of intelligence even though. . . If I'd asked why, I would've known, but I was so afraid. . . I don't want my kids to go through that. I want them to ask questions. I know that not having an education in my life put me through such obstacles, I had to jump such hurdles in my life to get where I am now." Sid had gained the same kind of self-knowledge (Chaplin, 1993) and self-esteem (Lytle & Wolfe, 1989) that Dell had, so that now both have the confidence to open their mouths.

Before the interview ended, I wanted to check on a few more items with Sid. First, I asked what the community college experience had been like for her. She had plenty to say about that. "When I came here, I had no idea. I just kept thinking of how poorly I'd always done in school. But I saw all these people and all these programs for learning disabilities, handicaps—There's a place for me here. It's not the way it was before. People don't know me here, and they're giving me a chance. They don't think I'm an idiot. I'm not wearing this mask any more; I can be just like everybody else here, and they'll give me a fair shot. This college is a great resource for anybody, whether they don't have education or money. I was really happy that the faculty opened up their hearts and their arms to me and made me feel like I could do it." So once again the developmental aspects of the community college and the student-centered pedagogy that prevails made a difference for one of the pilgrims.

Another thing I wanted Sid to talk about was whether or not she told her own story to herself sometimes when things got tough, to keep herself going. Her answer was a little different from those of the other pilgrims. "When things are really bad, it's hard to even reflect on what you've done and what you've achieved. You're looking down a pit, and it's like, 'This is where things have brought me to, and there may be no way out of this.' Sometimes it takes somebody else to remind me." She explained that sometimes her new husband did this for her, helped her remember, and this empowered her. When he did this, she would end up saying, "Okay, that's right. I'm Sid, and I know I can do it." And she told me about her "trophies", things that she gets out and looks at when she's feeling low: the Hispanic Heritage Leadership awards that she got from the county, her English papers—"That keeps it fresh here," she said, tapping her head.

Finally, I shared with Sid the fact that all of my other pilgrims had shown some way of giving what they knew to others, and that the giving back that came to my mind about her, in addition to all her welfare reform activities, was her breast-feeding counseling for the WIC program. "Oh, yeah," she said. "I read so much about breast feeding. It was so positive, and I felt like everybody should do it. I felt that if I could pass that on, I could help everybody, mothers and babies. Change the world one mother at a time." Like the other pilgrims, Sid had found something that worked for her, and her instinct was to pass it on to others.

Sid plans now to find a way to finish a Bachelor's degree. She has already located a law school that will allow her to enter after three years of college. She knows that it might take a while and have to be done part-time because her second child is just a little baby at this point. At the end of the interview, I asked her if she had any last words for the "home audience." Here they are: "Don't give up. Never let anything stand in your way. There's always somebody there to help you if you knock on enough doors. (At this point she laughed at herself, thinking, I suppose, of all the doors that she has learned to knock on.) Follow your instincts, and never let anybody get the best of you. Don't let them break your spirit." I would add to these words, on her behalf, "Use your own anger in a constructive way."

CHAPTER X

"I WANT MY OWN WORDS TO BE HEARD."

Besides faculty members, there is another clientele in community college writing centers that doesn't get talked about much in the literature: people from the larger community outside the college. We've never practiced much community outreach in my school's writing center. We've wanted to and planned to, but the resources of staff have never been available to really advertise and consciously reach out into the county. But our school, like many community colleges, does have non-credit programs for senior citizens. One of these programs happens to be in creative writing, and several of its participants over the years have found the writing center and used its services in conjunction with their workshop class. Brochures about the non-credit classes go out to seniors in their homes, and Ronnie got one of them. He realized that maybe someone at the college might help him with a writing project. It turned out, as we got to know Ronnie, that his purposes were mainly to participate in a community of writers as a member and to have his own voice heard. More than any of the other pilgrims, the desire for a voice was his greatest motivator.

Ronnie, a tall, handsome eighty-two year old, came to the writing center in the winter of 1999. He had just written his memoirs, four hundred pages that covered the time from his childhood to age twenty-eight, and he wanted some editorial assistance to get them in shape for publishing for his friends and family. I set him up with one of our professional tutors, Kathleen, who is a writer of memoirs herself, and they worked together every Friday for that whole semester. She tried to persuade him to learn the computer and write there instead of on the tedious typewriter that he was using, but he couldn't be convinced. After his visit each week, she would tell me some little tidbit of his life story, and it was fascinating. From time to time he brought in cookies for us, and little gold ballpoint pens with angels on them, and piles of novels that he thought Kathleen would enjoy from his collection of publishers' remainders at home.

Over the summer we didn't see Ronnie, but when he showed up in the fall, we learned that he had taken his manuscript to a word processing person and had most of it now on a disk. He brought me four brown envelopes of the finished product, several early chapters of his story for me to read and enjoy. He was so elated at the time, at the prospect of having a beautiful finished product for all his labors, that I asked him to be a participant in my study.

It is important to note that the literacy concerns of senior citizens are quite different from those of students. Their purposes, which we have come to see are an important factor in motivating enhanced literacy, are not governed by academic concerns such as writing a term paper or passing an essay exam, unless, as is true in some cases, they are enrolled as students in regular academic courses. Instead, their writing is self-sponsored, intended to reach a transactional goal that stems from their own initiative. Their motives, for the most part, are not to achieve through increased literacy some huge changes in their lives. Perhaps they do want to make one change, though: they want to enter the community of writers.

As I began to read the pages of autobiography that Ronnie brought me, I was amazed at the story he had to tell. Orphaned by the influenza epidemic when he was three, raised by Polish-speaking foster parents in their fifties or sixties in a green company row house in the coal fields of northeastern Pennsylvania, Ronnie had grown up poor and bilingual. There were tales of herding cows and flocks of ducks, growing tomatoes and cabbages to feed the family for the winter, and sailing paper ships on a nearby pond. Ronnie described games that I had never heard of, like "can on the rock" and "caddy". And he told of the still his foster-father built in the basement which produced the "pure lightning" that would help the men in the neighborhood overcome some of the ill effects of the coal dust. He described his foster-mother washing her hair with the brine from the sauerkraut as though it were a religious ritual. He explained the medicinal uses of Octagon soap, the work and fees of midwives, and what life was like without electricity. All in all, he conjured up a time and place that no longer exists and made it breathe with detail. All the little particulars were there—colors, shapes, sounds, smells, tastes, and textures. We tend to characterize the minds of older people as forgetful, but it seemed that Ronnie remembered everything. I was especially amazed at his depiction of characters. They all had names, detailed physical descriptions and insightful personality characterizations. It was another world.

Ronnie's book was divided into chapters, and what struck me was that the longest one, almost a quarter of the four hundred pages, was entitled "Learning to Read." It was obvious that literacy had always been one of Ronnie's preoccupations, and I looked forward to my interview with him.

When I questioned Ronnie about his early literacy experiences, he explained that he had attended a Polish Catholic school where, with the help of nuns and neighbors, he learned to read and write in both Polish and English. "When it came to learning to read", he said, "the comics were our greatest: Maggie and Jiggs, the Happy Hooligans, Popeye." Their newspaper was Polish, but the comics were in English. He says that by the fifth grade he could read independently, and he could "speed read" and write in Polish. "What I had that others didn't have was that my foster parents never spoke a word of English in the house. It was strictly a Polish dialect, and I could read Polish faster than I could English." He wrote all of his foster parents' letters to Poland for them, and in sixth grade he won a prize for his composition in English on the history of the mail system in this country.

Ronnie remembered that when it was time to begin fifth grade, he wanted to switch from the Polish school to the English school and try that out. "I registered and everything was fine; I stayed right where I was at, in the fifth grade. But I started off and started having a toothache. I'd leave school and come back to the house. When I got home, the toothache would go away. That happened for a whole week and a half. So I came back to the Polish school. I appreciated what was there. I felt more comfortable, more at ease." Perhaps Ronnie experienced a little of the culture shock in this experience that Komal and Sarah had talked about.

Even as a school child, he remembers, he found that he always wanted to take what he had and make it better. "When I was a kid, I had to use my imagination. I would see what was and start building for myself. This was my education. My education was the people around me." He told me about using the city dump as a resource. "If we wanted anything, if you waited long enough, something would be there. I would bring it home; I was handy with tools, so I built everything." This was only the first of many times that Ronnie would reveal the "internal force" (Wlodkowski, 1985) that would drive him throughout his life.

Ronnie didn't have a high school education because "there was a little Depression at the time. You had to pay for books, and my parents didn't have the money." He explained that it was hard enough, "by hook or crook", for him to come up with the money for his diploma and pictures from eighth grade. In fact, as I remembered from reading those pages of his book, he had borrowed the money, $2.50, from two older boys who had reputations as thieves. He became associated with them in people's minds, and ended up spending a night in jail when the other two robbed a local gas station.

After eighth grade Ronnie left school, because he was "big enough and strong enough" to earn a living, acting as a runner and helper at the local market, and selling newspapers that he got in Scranton. Sometimes he and his friends would go to the local coal dump and scavenge usable coal. "We were all there, like a harvest, like a squirrel putting nuts inside." They would bring bags of the chunk coal back to the green company houses and sell it for two or three dollars a ton. The following spring his foster parents sent him out to live on his own. "That was the beginning of my full education."

Ronnie, indeed, found his education everywhere. It wasn't always what we might call literacy in the sense of reading and writing, but it was a literacy of the world and how it worked. He spent some time as a freight-car hobo, criss-crossing the country. He didn't write to anyone during that time because he had no address. One of his Pennsylvania buddies told him as he left town that there would be a letter waiting for him in Great Falls, Montana, but Ronnie never got it because he had no idea how to use the post office. He worked for a while as a hand on a Montana ranch. Then he made his way to Hollywood and got a job as a houseboy. When he began this job, he wrote a letter home to one of his friends, because now, "I had an address to get a letter." But this job didn't work out. "I spent two weeks in the house, and the cat ate better than I did. I was supposed to be paid $2.50 a week, but the first week I didn't see a dime, and the second week I didn't see a nickel. So I went to Hollywood Boulevard to panhandle, and I got pretty good at it." He got in trouble there when one of the other panhandlers stole a pawnbroker's brother's jacket and tried to pawn it. They all got arrested and spent a day and a night in jail. "It was time to leave before I got into any more trouble." He caught a freight to Tucson and got a job serving in the officer's mess at the local Army base. From there he traveled to the farm of some of his birth parents' relatives in Binghamton, New York and spent some time there. This was a happy time for Ronnie, because it was the first time he had ever been with actual blood relatives, and he felt as if he belonged.

After a few years, Ronnie joined the merchant marine, and a world of books and educated people opened up to him, as well as the sights and sounds of the world. He found himself hearing and reading ideas that were new to him. "Every ship had a little library. Some of the fellas on the ship had two or three years of college; some were graduates. I started picking up certain ideas, telling me this, telling me that." He took on the role of scribe for his shipmates, writing love letters for them to send to wives and girl friends. He learned Urdu while stranded in India ("I started grasping that some of the words in Urdu were matching the same letters that I had in Polish. The Indian language came to me very fast. By the time we left, I was pretty good"). At the same time he perfected a British accent. "I admired the language and diction of Ronald Coleman. I wanted to learn it the way he had it, and I tried to follow it. The fellas on the ships knew different accents, but in the time in India I could imitate an Englishman like nobody's business. They would never believe I was an American." He was impressed by the pomp and ceremony of the British colony; he says, "It made me feel that I'd like to be something."

Nowhere in Ronnie's writing or in speaking with him had I seen what might be called a period of "prolonged tension." He wrote and spoke matter-of-factly about the events of his early life, and never betrayed the desperate yearning for book learning that some of the other pilgrims did. There didn't seem to be the urgency that they had. And yet, whenever he came upon an opportunity, he pounced on it. He took, for instance, the skills that he had gained in being bi-lingual and applied them to the learning of another language, an example of "literate know-how"; and he targeted a dialect that he coveted for himself and made it his own.

Ronnie remembers that after a few years at sea, he took a girl home from a dance at the Seaman's House on West 20th Street in New York City. She said, "I love to hear you talk." As he told it, "That put a flair in my ego. I knew that my past from the coal mines of Pennsylvania, that was diminishing and I was following a different dialect." Here, as in learning the diction of Ronald Coleman, is evidence that Ronnie was intending to change his life through language (Fingeret & Drennon, 1997), and that success in this regard provided a reinforcement for him (Wlodkowski, 1985).

I mentioned to Ronnie at this point that it seemed he was on his own path. "I always wanted something better than I had. On every trip to sea there was a new batch of books, and different fellas with different things to say. My travels were advancing me to a different stage. Going through Europe, seeing what it was like—I was happy to know what I saw, what I was listening to, what I was getting to. I felt myself better than what I was in Pennsylvania. I wanted to get above the steps that I was on."

When he fell in love with his wife, Ronnie said, his mind came alive, and he began writing in earnest. He became a chronicler of the day's events shipboard, to keep her posted on his life while he was away from her. At their wedding, the rabbis were impressed with all he had learned from his travels. "Why don't you send this boy to college?" they asked. "He's smart." Ronnie says, "It was a wonderful feeling." Back at sea, he says, he found he "could take a whole day on the ship and write a chapter about what we were doing. So this was already enveloped in me. It was just like someone opening up an envelope and saying, 'Here you are.'" It seemed to me when he said this that Ronnie was describing a new understanding of himself, perhaps one of the effects of literacy described by Lytle & Wolfe (1989) as "increased self-esteem and self-determination" (p. 66).

During the Sixties, Ronnie began writing short stories. He wrote the story of his ship in poetry, thirty or forty stanzas long. He thought of The Rime of the Ancient Mariner and Shakespeare, both taught to him by his eighth grade nun. "This all came back to me when I started to write. All my experiences came from past to present." I'm not sure how to characterize what Ronnie described here, the bringing together of things that he'd learned earlier in his life with those from the present, except to say that now he had experiences of his own with which to compare things that he read as a young man, and that perhaps putting his own experiences in writing facilitated the synthesis of the two.

A few years ago Ronnie began composing short pieces for the local newspaper. One of them, a piece about smuggling gold out of Sweden under the noses of the Nazis, was published under the heading "Guest Columnist." People said, "Why don't you write? You've got so much to write about." He got such a good response from readers about this article and his letters to the editor, that in 1998 he decided it was time to write the story of his life. Having his writing accepted this way, and getting positive feedback from his readers, provided a reinforcement for Ronnie that made him want to do more. The same thing had happened to Indiana when his piece on how to do research was included on the web page.

Ronnie sat at the typewriter every evening while his wife watched TV, writing seven or eight pages each night. He says, "It just grew." By January, 1999, he had cranked out the first four hundred pages. I asked him if he ever got frustrated, whether he ever wanted to quit and never do it again. He said, "I just put it away and sleep on it. Sometimes when you get really mesmerized by it, it's like eating too much of a good thing. You just have to save some for another day." I've thought of these words of his often as I've been writing this dissertation.

Ronnie says of his tutor, "I took every little hint. Every time I came back with a revision, she liked it more. When I gave her books, she said, 'I like your memoir better.' I took her around the world with me." As far as whether the community college had made a difference to Ronnie, I didn't even have to ask him, because he had said it clearly at the end of the acknowledgements page for his book: "I owe it all to Rockland Community College and to my tutor in the Writing Center, Kathleen."

I could tell, after more than an hour of the interview was past, that Ronnie was getting tired. He must have decided himself that he wouldn't be able to talk for much longer, and he steered the conversation by clearly framing some concluding remarks that would tie up the loose ends and give some closure. "In my position at the present time [facing cancer surgery],"he said, " I find that I want my own words. When I want to pray to God, I want my own words. I don't want other words that I could read. That's theirs, that's their prayers. I want my own prayer. . . There isn't a night that's passed when I didn't speak out and say to God, 'I know I haven't been the perfect man, but I need you now. ' I can't find that in a book. It tells me 'thou shalt this, that,' but that's someone else's words. I want my own words, I want my own words to be heard. . . What I'm doing is writing for myself. Others say they love what I write. I want it my way." So when it comes down to it for Ronnie, the real purpose of literacy is that of voice (Stein, 1995), a voice that "makes sense" of things, in the way that's unique to him, that he has experienced in his life. He concluded by saying:

> I always believed that my life was being transformed by somebody else that wanted me to follow that path. Even to this day, I still believe that I have a certain guide within me. . . As a child, I knew nothing. I ran barefooted and others couldn't understand how. I was in a different world. If I was in a world where somebody understood me, my life would've been different, see. But I was in a world fashioned by myself, all alone...

That same day he asked me for help in finding out how to copyright his memoirs so that he could give the rights to his local Cancer Society for any profits realized from the publication.

CHAPTER XI

AM I A PILGRIM, TOO?

In Chapter One, I explained that my interest in these pilgrims and their stories came largely from the fact that I could see myself in them, my own struggles and interruptions and obstacles on my own winding path to higher literacy. In revealing the connections that I see between my story and theirs and the things that made me see them the way I did, I hope to be as forthcoming and vulnerable as they have been.

Although I did not have the cognitive barriers of learning disabilities or head injuries, nor did I have the huge cultural and language boundaries to cross, there were occasions for me on my own literacy path to have the same reactions to circumstances that many of the pilgrims had. I experienced a successful public school career, and my school and my family expected me to go to college, unlike Dell and James and Sid. Although I had social and class boundaries to deal with, I did not face adjustment to a different language or a whole different culture as Sarah and Komal did. One could say that, compared to the pilgrims, I had no obstacles in the way of my attaining as high a level of literacy and learning as I could wish.

When I look at my own path from the vantage point of the present, however, and try to identify what I see as obstacles for myself, I see them in two general categories. First of all, I made choices that I sought to honor, and these choices involved consequences. I made one commitment (marriage) that soon involved others (children), and it was important to me to live up the responsibilities of those commitments. By making this choice, I created circumstances (lack of time and money) that militated against continuing education. The issue of rejoining the path of literacy and learning at that point became not one of motivation, but one of justification.

The second rock on my path is perhaps an idiopathic one, or perhaps not. As a human being with many facets and roles, the intellectual part of me has always existed inextricably entwined with the emotional part, "the whole package", as my second husband used to describe it. This reality has been both blessing and curse. It's been a blessing in that, I believe, the emotional side has lent a certain passion to my intellectual pursuits. But it has been a curse in terms of my single-mindedly and objectively pursuing the path to higher literacy. Although the two exist symbiotically, the emotional side has always been the driver, with the intellectual allowed to function only in ways that could be validated by and supportive of my own emotional truth and reality. Perhaps this situation can be explained by Belenky et al's (1986) concept of connected thinking, and perhaps that's why this part of their book resonated with me. Or maybe what I see in myself is something else entirely. I think I can show what I mean by this connectedness better than I can tell it.

Like Sarah and Komal, I was born on the path to literacy. I am the seventh of eight children, born in 1940. When I was a little pre-schooler, my five older sisters were all in school. And when they weren't in school, they were playing school in the summer kitchen at the back of our rambling old saltbox. Since I was their favorite toy, it was only natural that they would seize on me as a likely pupil with whom to share whatever they had learned that day. They had me reading by the time I was four.

Once they showed me how to crack the print code, I became an insatiable reader. They still like to tell the story of the day I disappeared. My mother suddenly realized that she hadn't seen me for a while, and the search began, throughout the little New England village where I grew up. My family and my neighbors looked everywhere, even in the dreaded swamp which my mother was always sure would drown one of her children. I was nowhere to be found. I was oblivious to their calling my name all around the house, for I had discovered late that morning that all those newspapers stored in the shed behind the summer kitchen included hundred of pages of Sunday comics, "funny papers" as we used to call them, and I was finding and reading every one. I lost all track of time, until finally at around suppertime my mother thought to look there. No one would believe that I hadn't heard them calling, but I had been in my own world. I just had to take the punishment. So when Ronnie recalled that his favorite reading when he was young was the comics, I had to chuckle inwardly.

In spite of my ability to read, school itself was a shock to me. I found it very hard to be cooped up in a room with twenty-or-so other kids all day in a building that smelled of oiled wood floors, disinfectant, and chalk dust when I had been used to roaming the outdoors freely all day long. It was fun to learn things, but the claustrophobia I got was so bad that I would go to the school nurse two or three times a week feeling really sick, and my mother would come and take me home. This routine continued all the way into my first year of high school. My mother never complained, even though she knew that as soon as I got home, like Ronnie coming home from the English-speaking school with a toothache, I would be fine; she just came and got me.

We had a nice little library in our town that was open only Wednesday and Saturday. Whenever my dad was home on one of those days, he would take me with him, and I would choose my books while he chose his. He was always reading. Although he only finished high school, he kept educating himself through books: history, biography, geography, these were his favorite topics. As I got old enough to walk that far myself, I would go to the library alone both days it was open, each time taking the six books that were allowed and reading them all by the next library day. So, like Sarah, I read at least a book a day, but unlike her, I didn't particularly write.

In spite of the claustrophobia, the actual work of school was easy for me, very easy. I think that I can thank my sisters for that: early success at reading had made even early academics make easy sense. Luckily, we had three grades to a room, so I could keep from getting bored by listening in on the lessons of the higher grades. But like Sid, who remembered her miscue of the word "skirt" (although unlike her, I did not make many), I still remember two that happened when I was reading aloud in about second grade: I once read "giant" as "gaint" and couldn't say it any other way, and when I first encountered the construction "had had", it stopped me dead in my tracks. Knowing the shame I felt from these two little incidents, I can't imagine hers.

Although schoolwork was easy and fun for me, I was painfully aware that this was not true for all my classmates. There was always at least one in each grade level who, like Sid and Dell and James, "didn't get it". Usually it was a boy, who stumbled when he read or added 2+2 and got 5. One boy in my own grade, Eddie West, seemed to be in this position often. The teacher's response to his errors was always the same: impatience and words that humiliated him. As his whole blonde head turned bright red from embarrassment after her words, I just wanted to die for him. (Someone in high school must have told Eddie, as they did Dell and Sid, that he should find something to do with his hands. I see him sometimes at the auto repair shop that he opened in my hometown.) Because I came to believe that this behavior was inherent in the role of teacher, I made up my mind then never to be one.

When I was nine, my dad took us on a trip that I believe changed my life. He planned it for a year and included my younger brother and me in the planning, since we were the only children who would be included. His plan was to take the seats out of my mother's new school bus when the school year ended, to build in beds and storage, and to drive us to the Golden Gate Bridge, visiting as many national parks as we could fit into six weeks. He bought a two-volume set of books on the parks, which we were assigned to read, and ordered trip maps from the Conoco Oil Company. We set off the day after my older sister's wedding, June 18, 1950.

That trip totally expanded my view of literacy in ways that I'm still exploring. Hearing all the dialects of the people along the way and the differences in vocabulary (for example, I'd never heard anyone actually say the word "nary" before I heard it come out of the mouth of a storekeeper in Amarillo) made me realize that there was more to the United States than just New England. Seeing a Black person for the first time, a man pumping gas for us in Georgia, and hearing my dad address him as "Sir" taught me a whole volume in one word. My dad stopped at every historical marker that we passed, and he made us (mostly me, because my brother was only six) read each one out loud from beginning to end, so that we would learn something. When we got to the West and many of these markers told of Indian battles and massacres, he would turn to us after I finished reading, shake his finger, and say, "Never forget what we did to these people." I never did. What my dad accomplished for me with this trip was to make real all the history I had read in the dozens of Landmark series books that I had borrowed from the library and to give me a context within which to put all the reading that I've done since. Like Komal's father, I believe that he knew exactly what he was doing. From that trip to this day, I see this whole country as my home, not just the little northeast corner where we were all born and grew up.

When it was time for me to go to high school, my seven classmates and I were bussed into the nearest city, Lowell, Massachusetts, to the biggest building I had ever been in in my life. The diversity in the student body thrilled me, though. Because Lowell was a textile mill town, it had attracted immigrants from a wide variety of places. My classmates were the second generation of these immigrants, people like Anita DaSilva, Judy Greenberg, Stacia Szamanis and even Paul Tsongas and his sister Thalia. This was so much more interesting a group of people than I had seen in my three-room country school: I loved it. Once again, the schoolwork was easy (I seldom remember having much homework; I got it all done in study hall), but the claustrophobia in this huge and teeming place went on for a whole year. There were tracks in that school, and I was in the College Preparatory one, which included four years of Latin and history, three years of another foreign language, and four years of math. I never got anything but an "A" until my senior year. At that time I had an English teacher who decided that part of our curriculum should be creative writing, and he assigned us to write an imaginative narrative. I was paralyzed. I couldn't make up a story. I could write essays on any topic you could name, but I couldn't invent a story. My piece was a total, unmitigated, disaster, and by the mid-year, my average in his class was "B". In about January, however, our SAT results came back. I had the highest combination of scores ever seen in that high school. The principal called me and my English teacher to his office. He felt that it wouldn't look right for me to have these scores and yet also have a "B" in English, so he ordered my teacher to change my grade to "A". My teacher looked at me and smiled and said, "I'll do it, but you and I both know that you deserve a "B". I knew it, and I wouldn't have minded having it. I'd always been called "smart", but to me smart meant being able to write creatively. I knew that I couldn't do that. My only smarts came from having a good memory, the luck of genetics. This same teacher gave us a list of 200 books to read over the summer, books that anyone entering college should be familiar with. I read them all.

No one in my family had ever gone to college. I had no clue about that; like many of the pilgrims in this study, I was going to have to invent that part of my life and draw the map from scratch. I knew that I was expected to go, and I wanted to go, but the question was where. My advisor at school wanted me to apply to Radcliffe and Smith and the other Seven Sisters schools. I knew enough of New England class consciousness, however, to realize that I would be totally out of place there in 1958. Besides not having the right clothes to wear and the knowledge of which fork to use, I didn't even know what I would talk to those girls about. Maybe it was a kind of reverse snobbery on my part, but I really wanted to be someplace where there would be people like me, first-generation college students from blue-collar families. Like Sid, I had had experiences of being the "oddball" because of social class, and I didn't want to spend four years living like that. Bates gave me a good scholarship, and that's where I decided to go. All I knew about it was that it was small, and that it gave a solid liberal arts education. I never even visited before the fall semester began; I just went.

It was a good choice for me, a very egalitarian kind of place. There were plenty of scholarship students like me, and, aside from keeping to the dress code of no slacks for women in the dining room or the classroom except during blizzards, it didn't really matter what you wore. The core curriculum was fairly rigid; everyone took the same things for the first two years, and so the only choice was which foreign language. I found it somewhat harder than high school, but I put in my time with the books and did just fine. Once again, a good memory served me well. Except in English. Nowhere on my senior teacher's reading list were the kinds of "modern" writers that we had to read in Freshman English. Our text was compiled of short stories by Lawrence, Joyce, and others whom I had never heard of. And I found the realism and the sexuality explained by the professor very disconcerting to say the least. I was only seventeen, for Pete's sake; I didn't need to know that the little kid in "The Rockinghorse Winner" was rocking in order to masturbate. There was no place for this kind of knowledge in the pretty little world I lived in. I was lost. Reading those 200 books had done me no good at all. And the writing. This teacher also had a Right Answer approach to the writing of papers about literature that had me mystified. Whatever the work we were to write about, he had decided in advance what our thesis should be, but he never told us. Where was he getting these thematic certainties, I wondered? I felt the same way Dell must have when he was first assigned to read the "classics". This teacher became my nemesis, and English was scratched permanently from my list of possible majors. What a pity. The one-man philosophy department, on the other hand, liked the way I thought and wrote, so that became my major.

Some of the best reading I did during those years was self-sponsored. My German professor had told us during the first semester that if we did all our assignments on a regular basis for all our courses, there should be no need for us to cram for final exams. I took him at his word. I spent that reading week each semester in the lower stacks of the library, reading whatever caught my fancy. One semester it was all of Tennessee William's plays; another, it was all the Time magazines from the World War Two years; and another, it was all of Camus. College was fun, the studies were fun, everything was fine, until my junior year.

Out of nowhere, I started to feel bothered. First, *in loco parentis* started wearing thin, especially because it was administered much more strictly with women than with men. I had more freedom at home than I did at school. And then the honor system for dorm life started to look like a fraud to me, as I saw “insiders” excusing each other for infractions while at the same time setting traps for “outsiders”. I turned twenty, and I wanted to be a grown-up. It felt wrong to have all my physical needs taken care of by a laundry service, a dining hall, and a maid that cleaned my room. In addition, I had found that when I went home on vacations, it was hard for me to talk to my family. I felt as though I had somehow left their world for a bigger one, and I no longer knew how to make conversation about everyday things. The intellectual part of college was great, but all this other stuff did not fit with my emotional reality. It drove me crazy enough to get engaged to a senior and drop out of school when he graduated. I had looked forward to the academic side of senior year (I had even planned my thesis project, which somehow involved translating Karl Jaspers from the original German), but the feeling of being infantilized and estranged from my family (and maybe a good dose of hormones) was too much. Feelings took charge, and I was out of there.

We moved to Boston so that my husband could attend seminary. I had vague hopes of finishing my senior year on a part-time basis at one of Boston's many colleges, but I found that the only one that didn't require full-time residence for the senior year was Northeastern. When I transferred my credits there, I lost almost a full year's worth. At the rate I could take courses (one a semester because of my full-time job), I knew we wouldn't be in Boston long enough for me to finish. I did take two semesters of British Lit, but that was all. In 1962, I began what I now refer to as the eighteen "drop-out years".

During the early Sixties, it was possible to get a decent job without a college degree. Many employers considered three years of college almost as good as four. Credentials did not carry the weight that they do today. I worked in libraries for the next seven years, reading everything in sight, until my first child was born. I learned to inventory collections, locate their weak spots, and look to the Fiction Catalogue and the Non-fiction Catalogue to find reputable books to fill the gaps. As a bookmobile supervisor for the State Library of New Hampshire, I helped 60 small public libraries supplement their own collections. One part of my job was to review and evaluate every new children's book that came out and make recommendations for purchase to these small-town librarians. My colleagues were generous with their knowledge, and I learned to judge these books pretty well.

It wasn't a time in the social history of this country when being a working mother was particularly acceptable, although I really wanted to be one. I tried it for six months, but childcare was impossible to find, and the guilt laid on by the church ladies was too heavy a load. Besides, it seemed that the pattern of my husband's career would involve moving every three years, so it hardly seemed worth it to contemplate any kind of steady career for myself. I stayed home and read, this time books on child psychology and education, ecology and philosophy. I read *good* stuff. I had learned from my library training how to evaluate books, and, like the pilgrims, I took a literacy tool from one setting and put it to use in another. Friday night was my alone time, and I would head for the bathtub with a good book (that's where I read Maslow) and a bottle of scotch. By constantly refreshing the hot water, I could make that time last three or four hours, until I got too tipsy or too pruny. I took everything I read and contextualized it in some way, in my family, in my church, with my friends. I gave precis to everyone that I talked to. There wasn't a problem or issue or question in my life at that time that couldn't be solved with a good book. One of the main understandings that I arrived at from reading Maslow, and John Holt, and A.S. Neill was that human beings are born to learn, and that the learning only stops when something (usually bad teaching or a bad school system) gets in its way. Years later in graduate school, Dr. Peter Fries would remind me to "get out of their way and let them learn."

By the time our third child arrived, we were living in a small college town in Michigan. I was lucky enough to find there two intellectual discussion buddies. One was the senior minister in our church, who bought me a subscription to a really cutting-edge theology journal that he subscribed to for himself (I remember that the first issue had a piece by Walker Percy). A week after each issue arrived, he would come over and we would dissect its contents. The other was a college English professor who attended our church. He and I led adult discussion groups on thought-provoking books. These two kept my mind alive, and they treated me like an equal.

My head was full of words at this time, other people's words. I never felt, the way Ronnie did, that I needed my own words to be heard. Other people's words were fine with me. I played guitar by then, and I memorized about 300 songs: these were the words that told the story of my life to me, the words of Joan Baez and Judy Collins, Pete Seeger and Leonard Cohen, Willie Nelson and John Denver. My daughter sent me a postcard once when she was in college that said: "The problem with reality is that there's no background music." But my reality at that time had background music: a song for every occasion. Sid and James had written their own songs as a means of expression, but I didn't even need my own: others' would do just fine. So while reading was constant, the only writing that I did during those drop-out years was in long letters to my parents.

We moved around that same area of Michigan for a while, and I can truthfully say that I never yearned to go back to school; it wasn't on my list of possibilities. I had my hands full at that time with four kids, and my mission was to give them the best childhood possible with little or no money. It took all my ingenuity to feed and clothe them, and to provide as much enrichment as possible on a shoestring. But gradually I started to realize that if they were to be raised, I would have to earn some money, too.

At first I did things that could be done at home. I sewed for people, and I provided day care for a little autistic girl named Elizabeth, whose mother was on the verge of a nervous breakdown. I had read Dibs: In Search of Self, and I understood a little about what autism was. I had a friend, the director of the county mental health center, who helped me understand more and develop some techniques for working with her.

Although Elizabeth lived in her own world, silent except for occasional inappropriate and unintelligible vocalizations, it became clear to me that there was a huge intellect tied up inside her beautiful little self. It was as if she had sensory antennae all over her body, giving her so many messages about the outside world that she could hardly stand it. When we went out for walks, on the uneven slate sidewalks of our town, her eyes were always tilted skyward, yet she never missed a step, never tripped or stumbled. Although she always averted her face from me when I talked to her, her body would strain to move closer to my voice. She spent most of her time in the house walking in circles, round and round, clutching one of my daughter's dolls from which she had removed the head, as if a face was just too much to deal with at close range. My daughter was the same age at the time, and I believe that seeing those two together, the one so social, curious, bright and outgoing, and the other also obviously curious and bright, but locked up in her own world, made me ready when I met students like Dell and James and Sid to see that "different" didn't mean "dumb". Being with Elizabeth on a daily basis for two years taught me that intelligence comes in different forms.

After Elizabeth moved on to a special ed program, I signed on to do foster care for the county social services department. I fostered babies, elementary-aged kids, and finally a group of pre-delinquent teen-aged girls. Probably the memory of this experience helped me to empathize with Sid's anger at the welfare department. I found those people to be arrogant, arbitrary, hung up on their own rules, and driven by wrong-headed theories about what was good for people. After two years, like Sid, I "never wanted to see those people again."

It was when I went back into the job market outside the home on a part-time basis that I realized that I would always be working for someone who knew less than I did unless I got some credentials. Like Dell, I saw that I had the knowledge to carry out important work, but without credentials I would never gain entry or be listened to. I met a man at family camp who taught biology at the university in the next county over from my home. Part of his job was to mentor and advise in-coming distance-learning students. He explained that a person could do all her course work at home, and that he thought I could do it. I can't attribute my motivation at that time to anything as grand as changing my life. I wanted access, definitely, and a voice to a certain extent, but mostly, given the situation I was in, I wanted the education and most of all the credentials that would allow me to have a satisfying job.

Credentials, it seems, proved to be one of the main purposes in seeking higher literacy, not only for me, but for most of the other pilgrims in this study, too. So many of them referred to the need, in this society, for a college degree in order to be successful. Dell needed it to take his place in the profession of his choice, occupational therapy. Sarah needed it to pursue a career in nutrition. Komal needed it to gain a responsible job in health information systems. And Sid would need it and more to do legal work for disadvantaged people. We might all have found jobs to support ourselves without the "piece of paper", but we wanted jobs that satisfy us and use everything we know. This kind of work requires credentials. We might say that Ronnie had passed the point in his life where such credentials are important, and yet to him, perhaps, the copyright is just such a credential.

As Komal put it, though, it was nice for me that the route to a good job involved intellectual activity for which I had an intrinsic motivation. That motivation had always been there, but the need for a job that could benefit the whole family provided the needed justification of credentials that would warrant the expenditure of time and money. Like many of my pilgrims, I had found my second chance, and I took the steps to begin.

At the same time I had the best job I'd ever had during those dropout years: singing in a bar three nights a week. I wasn't missing time with the kids to do it, because my sets started at 10 p.m., and it paid $5.00 an hour plus tips. One night, John, the husband of a friend of mine, came in with an out-of-town buddy. It was obvious that this was not the first bar they had visited that night. He was an English professor at the local college, and he and his friend invited me to join in their discussion of favorite books during my break. It was that night that I learned about Wallace Stegner's Angle of Repose, which is still one of my favorites.

During our discussion, John started telling me about a grant he had just gotten to start a Writing Center at the college. He was looking for six "nurturing mother types" to work there as paraprofessionals, and he wondered if I'd be interested. It would pay $6.00 an hour, and he would be glad to supervise independent study credits for me in my new degree program. I was interested, but thought to myself, "Yeah, call me in the morning when you're sober." The next day he called. It was tricky to work out the babysitting and transportation, but I took the job.

So here I was, in a new world. I knew nothing about college students, having lived in a world of small children for a long time. But John had a plan that involved having us teach small grammar lessons and lead discussions of some really neat books, like Even Cowgirls Get the Blues and The Monkey Wrench Gang. The other women were about ten years younger than I was, but we bonded quickly, and John believed in us.

The job was a great companion to my studies because I was doing the same thing that our students were doing. Each time I could put a hundred dollars or so together, I would send away for my next course. I was petrified each time a syllabus arrived. "I can't do this", I would say to myself. But it was paid for, sometimes with food money, and I had no choice but to begin, one assignment at a time, and just do it. College was very different from what I remembered. Memorizing was not going to do it for me this time. I found myself interpreting Shakespeare without the benefit of classroom lectures to help me. For one course in ecology, I was called upon to interview the water treatment engineer of my town and write a careful explanation of how our water system worked. For an independent study, I read best sellers from 1910 and 1970 and wrote a comparison of them based on traits that I saw with my own eyes. It was really different, and well outside my comfort zone. Exams and tests were sent to my local school superintendent, and I would go to his office to take them. Each course I finished represented three more credits in the bank.

Eventually the writing center model evolved somewhat. Each of us "nurturing mothers" was assigned to certain sections of one or two faculty members' composition classes, "lab" sections. We would attend each class once a week to observe what the teacher was doing, and then we would meet with each half of the class for an hour a week for supplemental group work in the writing center. Sometimes the teacher planned what we were to do, but increasingly we developed our own materials and took responsibility for the scheduling and operation of the writing center. It was a great chance to watch teachers in action, and I had plenty of help and advice on the papers I was writing.

One year I was assigned to a brand new teacher. She was my age, but this was her first full-time teaching position. I went to her class, and I was awestruck. My image of teacher-as-authority-figure-and-humiliator was shattered. She never raised her voice. The students talked more than she did. They wrote about their lives. And they wrote reams. She told me about Mina Shaughnessy and sentence combining and free writing. I was mesmerized. If this was what teaching writing could be, I wanted in.

My Bachelor's program was almost finished (I began with the class of 1962 and graduated with the class of 1982), and I realized that if I wanted to teach college composition, I would need graduate school: another level of credentials. I got the graduate catalogue from my university and started to thumb through it. When I came to one degree program, Master of Arts in English for Teaching in the Community College, it seemed to be lit up with neon. The college where I was working, although part of the state system, had been originally founded as an open-enrollment school for rural kids in the surrounding counties, and it had remained open. I loved the democratic open door, and I learned that community colleges were this way, too. And the master's program had requirements that "made sense", as Dell would say. They included courses in reading, linguistics, dialects, second language learning, composition theory—useful things to know for a person trying to teach open enrollment students.

As it was for Sid, the tough part of going to school for me was not so much the school work, but "the outside elements", as she put it, "my living." My life was very complicated, and everything had to be planned and calculated very carefully, every dollar and every hour. The scary part of graduate school was that I had to go there for the classes, two nights a week. It was twenty-six miles to my job, forty-four miles from my job to my class, and then thirty-six miles home, a big triangle. I had just gone back to driving after ten years of being a passenger, and we had only one car to share. We worked out a schedule so that my husband would have it enough to call on his parishioners and visit hospitals, and I would have it two days for school. The first night of class, I learned that the teacher had put materials on reserve at the library for us that needed to be read for the following week: Panic set in. How would I get the car from my husband to make a third trip that week, and when would I have the time to do it? Like many of the pilgrims, though, I wanted this, and I figured it out.

My first two teachers were women, Regina Hoover for Graduate Composition, and Clara Lee R. Moody, the director of the program, for the Community College Seminar. (I wouldn't consciously realize until years later that they were the first women teachers I'd ever had in my higher education.) Dr. Hoover was tough (as one of my classmates said, "What would you expect from someone named after two vacuum cleaners?"); she made us write a paper a week, one in each of the modes. The first ones, of course, were description and narration, and I froze remembering my aborted attempt at something creative in high school. She, however, had studied under Fritz Perls at one time, and gave us this wonderful Gestalt technique for making this kind of writing happen. I did exactly what she said, and, incredibly, I wrote a description of the porch at my dad's summer cottage and a narrative of coming to grips with my mother's death that are to this day two of my favorite pieces of my own writing. Regina Hoover gave me a gift: she showed me that stories didn't have to be made up, but that they could come from real life experiences. She also taught us that any good piece of writing, like an iceberg, shows only the top 10% of what's really there. "But", she explained, "if the other 90% isn't there underneath, the reader will know it."

I was afraid that being older would make school harder for me, a typical fear of returning students. On the contrary, I found that all those years at home, reading and living, had somehow sheathed my brain with something like the hooky side of Velcro. It was like a giant burr that grabbed on to any idea or insight that passed within reach and held it tight. It didn't matter that these gathered insights were sometimes contradictory or other times a little fuzzy: I grooved on paradox and ambiguity. I was in a real both/and mind frame, the parataxis that Jarratt describes in Re-reading the Sophists.

It was a satisfying experience to combine the writing center work with the master's work. Each fed the other. Something read for class could be applied to students, and issues that came up with students could find their place in classroom discussion. Attendance at a required lecture by Walter Ong became the key to unlock the academic writing skills of an older student from West Virginia. Theories in reading and second language learning, when applied to an immigrant Korean who was on the verge of failing out of college, raised his reading level six grades in six weeks. And my experience in tutoring had given me a knowledge of students that made my professors think that I'd been teaching for years. It was a beautiful marriage.

In the second year of my graduate program, I got permission to teach part-time along with working in the writing center. I taught one composition class and a couple of ESL classes most of the time, and I got sent off campus to work with two Dominican high school students and a group of French-Canadian electronic engineers. I felt as if I were joining the profession. When spring came, my department had several job openings in composition. I applied, but I was told right away by the head of the department that I would not be considered unless I started a PhD. program first. To my way of thinking, it needed to be the other way around: first a job, then a doctoral program. When the search reached the point of on-campus interviews for the finalists, this same chair asked if I'd be willing to interview each one, because there was no one else in the department who knew anything about composition theory. I said I'd be glad to talk to them, but that I would not write up an evaluation. Two weeks later he asked me if I would please sit in on the Promotion and Tenure Committee meeting when they reviewed tenure-track ESL teachers, because they were unfamiliar with ESL methods. We were standing in his office at the time, and I lost it. I yelled at him, "If I'm so damned smart, why don't you give me a job!" and slammed the door. All that work, all that study, all that learning, all those credentials earned, and there would be no job. At the same time, I was beginning to sense that my twenty-four year marriage was dead, but I really didn't want to think about it. My background music that spring was a song called "What I Did for Love."

I had to take six extra credits for the Master's program, because they waived the six-credit internship for me based on my writing center experience. I had run out of "useful" things to take at my university. My husband had finally filed and paid his income tax on time that year (for the first time in four), so I was able to apply for a student loan and register for two off-campus courses for the summer that could be transferred in: Purdue's prestigious Rhetoric Seminar, and Northeastern's Writing Teachers' Workshop on Martha's Vineyard. I had never been away from home alone before in 24 years of marriage, which was scary enough, but there was also a lot at stake for me, my whole graduate degree, in fact.

Purdue was intimidating, with a brutal amount of reading, listening to lectures, and discussion. I discovered, though, that I could hold my own in the discussions. Many of the big names in rhetoric and composition were there, and it was thrilling to hear the voices of people whose words I had only read before. One of the speakers was a woman about my age who had just recently completed her doctorate. I could tell by the way the older presenters treated her that they viewed her as a rising star in the field. The leader of the seminar liked to arrange little informal soirees with the speakers. These were held in the lounge at the graduate dorm. When we met thus with this particular woman, the conversation was very informal and down-to-earth. At one point she casually mentioned that when it was time for her to begin her doctoral program, her parents had paid for her children to attend boarding school so that her time would be freed for study. I felt a rage boiling up in my insides that I had never experienced before. It wasn't that I wanted to send my kids to boarding school; no, I never would've agreed to that. But somehow that remark made it clear to me that academic achievement was based not only on ability but also, perhaps to a large extent for women, on circumstances and money. I found this realization very discouraging. It wasn't that I needed a PhD. Even though my school wouldn't hire me without it, I knew that eventually I would probably find a teaching job somewhere. But to me the PhD. was like Everest: it was there, and I coveted the opportunity to test myself on it.

At about the same time, I thought that maybe I could get a teaching position somewhere else in the country, and that my family could move for me for once, and that my husband could come along and reinvent himself for a change, the way that I had had to do so many times before. But the instant that this idea was fully formed in my mind, I knew that it would never happen. His career would always take priority because it wasn't just a career, it was a calling, and it called the shots.

The Martha's Vineyard workshop proved to be not even half as challenging as Purdue. I felt that most of the participants were there in a kind of vacation mode. But it did give me plenty of time to mull over my recent realizations vis-a-vis my career, my education, and my marriage. And I did gain two more tangible things for my time there: I learned to write at the computer, and I got to hear William Zinser speak. At one point in his quiet, conversational talk, he said something like this about writing: "Say what you see, and your audience will find you." I thought about the teaching that I loved that I wasn't getting to do and the husband that I loved who'd lost interest in making a partnership with me, and I wondered if my audience was ever going to find me.

As is true for many returning students, a funny thing had happened to me on the way to credentials. Educational experiences had changed me in some fundamental ways. After more than twenty years of building my life around the needs of others, I was beginning to realize some needs of my own. These thoughts and feeling seemed selfish to me, and yet I believed (and still do) that we either change and grow, or we die. I didn't want to die on my kids, even if the death was only one of the spirit. So when I got home, I explained the situation to my husband, and we began counseling. It soon became clear, however, that he was not open to building a new kind of relationship with me. He just wanted things to be the way they were before I had these ideas put in my head by going to school. Like many of the pilgrims, however, I could not allow myself to turn back. I gave it until the end of the school year when, with four kids, an old VW bus, and $1000, I left for Cape Cod, to spend the summer in my dad's summer cottage next to his retirement house, to work as a chamber maid to put food on the table, and to begin a desperate search for a teaching job for the fall.

I went to Cape Cod Community College every week on my day off and read the Chronicle of Higher Education's classifieds. I sent resumes and cover letters for every position east of the Mississippi, but nothing panned out. I got a few interviews, and one seemed very promising, at a mostly Black state school in North Carolina. I was the only person they were interviewing; they said that the only way they would interview more would be if I turned them down. The English chair drove me around town to look at neighborhoods where I might like to live and showed me where the utility companies were. My interviews with the Provost and the Chancellor went fine. On the way back to the airport, the English chair gave me an employment application to fill out on the spot so that they could do the necessary paper work. There was a section in it entitled "Marital Status". My advisor in my Master's program had told us that no questions regarding personal life or age were permitted in a hiring situation, but that if they were asked, we should probably answer truthfully. So I did. I handed her the form and got on my plane. A week later I got a nice expense check from that school and not another word. If I'd been feeling more secure and confident, I probably would've made some kind of a discrimination challenge, but I was feeling neither.

An interview at another school, part of the State University of New York, didn't get me the job, but it did provide the promise of up to twenty hours of professional tutoring a week in it's EOP program. I picked a location for residence within driving distance of this and two community colleges and put together three-part time situations for that year. Again, finances and childcare were huge issues, but things came together. One of the part-time community college positions became full-time a year later when the writing center director resigned unexpectedly just before the fall semester. That year I also got remarried, and it seemed that my life was finally beginning to have sense and order again.

Part of my new job was to lead a writing-across-the-curriculum effort and expand the writing center to support it. I knew nothing about WAC, so, armed with several rolls of dimes, I headed to the nearest state university library and made copies of every ERIC document that related. I taught myself everything I needed to know about writing-to-learn and learning-to-write. This research became a paper for my first conference presentation the following spring at the SUNY Writing Council. When I gave it, Pat Belanoff was in the audience, and afterward she came up and asked whether I would send her a copy of it. I was flattered speechless. As Ronnie would say, "This gave a flair to my ego", or, as Sid would say, "This gave a boost to my self-esteem." You can bet that I had the paper in the mail the following Monday morning. In return, Pat sent me a draft of a chapter from the newest book that she and Peter Elbow were working on, and a letter in which she explained that she liked my paper because it had a human voice. I gave a version of it as my first 4 C's presentation the following year.

Meantime, my new husband, who was a few years older than I and had lived alone for his whole adult life prior to meeting me, was having trouble living with my two pre-teenagers. He was used to peace and quiet and order, not friends ringing the doorbell and the phone, things not where he left them, and a wife whose attention was divided between them and him. He tried, but he couldn't adjust. After a couple of years of a gradually deteriorating situation, he just wanted out. I was devastated, but I couldn't give in to the devastation because I still had two kids to raise. I knew that I could do what was necessary to raise them, but I saw no life for myself after the youngest one would graduate from high school. There was nothing there for me but a brick wall or a void.

I put one foot in front of the other for several months, but I found myself thinking more and more about the potential for a quick exit from this life once my parenting responsibilities were discharged. I didn't want a messy suicide, but something neat and clean that wouldn't leave horrible lasting images for the kids. I finally came up with a plan: On a cold February day, preferably with a heavy snowstorm advancing from the west, I would buy a bottle of J & B, drive to the Catskills, hike off at a tangent from some remote trail, drain the fifth, take off my clothes, and settle into a snow drift to fade into oblivion and not be found until spring. As the days went by, I found myself refining this plan, studying trail maps, deciding to take a bus instead of my car so as not to tip anyone off about where I was. This kind of thinking went on obsessively for a few months, until one day it finally dawned on my how crazy I was being and how much help I needed.

Turning to a shrink, which would have been the logical source for help and one I had made a couple of times before, never occurred to me at that time. Instead, I thought about a doctoral program, school as therapy. School had saved my life before, so maybe it could again. And a doctoral program was long enough to carry me over the dreaded and looming high school graduations.

Now, keep in mind that I had no business contemplating such an undertaking from a financial point of view. I was making 27K a year and getting about $400 a month in child support. There was no way. And yet, somehow, it made sense to me. I contacted doctoral programs around me: all of them required the first year in full-time residence. How, I asked, was I supposed to do that when I had a job to go to? "Take a leave of absence," they said. Right. And live on what, I wondered. At my most discouraged moment, the flyer from IUP came across my desk. "Summers only," it said."Two full summers of residence and the opportunity for independent study to make up the additional credits." The tuition was more reasonable than any place in New York. Could this work? I applied and was accepted. I applied for student loans to cover the cost. My older daughter had the summer off from her graduate program, so she would come and assume the role of mother. She had no car, so she would drive me there and bring mine home for the summer. I left a supply of big, brown mailing envelopes so that every week they could send me the bills that came in the mail, and a supply of deposit slips for the support checks that would come.

Terror would be an understatement for what I was feeling when we drove into Indiana, PA. It's one thing to do something hard because you have to, but I didn't have to do this. I had a job, and in another year I would have tenure. And I couldn't really explain to anyone that I was doing this simply to stay alive, so I'm sure that to the outside world (especially to ex-husbands) this move looked like a totally selfish one. I simply told myself that I would do it for as long as I could, go as far as I could, but that I must be prepared to bail at any moment if circumstances at home required it.

My first new friend was hauling her stuff into the graduate dorm when I arrived with mine. We hit it off right away, and it was a good thing, because I really felt panicky when it was time for my daughter to leave. This was it: sink or swim. Would I be able to justify the expenditure of time and money? Who knew?

At orientation the next day, we found out that it was three summers, not two. If my ride hadn't already left, I probably wouldn't have stayed. I also learned that the student loan I was counting on would be delayed because I needed to do something called a financial aid transcript from all the other institutions I had attended. The tuition and the dorm fees could wait to be covered by the loan, but I needed the extra for buying books. Luckily, my credit card limit had been raised just before I left home.

Then the courses began, and the work was intense, so much to read and write and think about. For one course, the only grade would be a thirty-page paper due on the last day of class, five weeks away. There were other written assignments, but they would not be graded. I didn't have the rhythm yet, so I didn't realize that to complete such a paper meant starting it by the end of the first week. And I chose a subject broad enough to write a book on. I was doomed, and I didn't even realize it until the end of the fourth week. When the date came for peer-editing, I was half finished and frantic. When the due date came, the drill was that you went to the professor's office with the paper, and he would read it and grade it in front of you. I appeared for my grading appointment. He read and made a list of pluses and minuses on the back of it. My research was +, but my synthesis was -. My grade was "B", and, like Sarah, to me a "B" meant failure. I cried all the way back to my dorm. Obviously I was not doctoral material. If I needed to keep an average of 3.75, I had blown it already. I went back to my room and started packing. There was no way I could deprive my kids of myself and whatever extras the money I was spending would provide just for the opportunity to get "B's". No way. Cut your losses. Get out while you still can. I was halfway packed before something snapped. Wait a minute. How fair was it to have one's whole grade based on one assignment? I knew the paper was bad, but that didn't make me stupid. Like Sid, my disappointment and despair turned to anger. I had a right to be there and to try. I was entitled to a chance. At least I could finish out the summer and then weigh the advisability of coming back. I vowed to eat that "B" and never get another one, and to stay in the program until somebody threw me out. The rest of the summer went fine. I had a great group of study-buddies who knew when to be serious and when to create hilarity. The faculty treated us like grown-ups, and once again the theory learned in class meshed wonderfully well with the practical experience of teaching. And I learned that I could insert some of the experiential, narrative writing that I had learned from Regina Hoover into academic papers.

When my kids came to pick me up at the end of the summer, they couldn't believe how rested I looked, as if I'd spent the summer at a spa, they said. I realized that my restored demeanor was the result of having had ten weeks to concentrate on only myself and the books for the first time in my life. And the brick wall that had loomed ahead had now dissolved, replaced by new friendships and new ideas and plans.

I'd been able to justify the first summer as suicide prevention, but the following ones were more difficult to justify. In fact, there was a constant war going on in my head, between the emotion and the intellect. The intellect just wanted to forge ahead, do the academic work, enjoy the experience. But the emotional side kept reminding me that the experience was a luxury of time and money that was depriving my kids. Back and forth it would go, week after week. The old credentials argument didn't work as a justification any more. These credentials were not a necessity for someone like me: they were a luxury.

One of the basic foundations of my parenting (and my teaching, too, I now realize) was my own accessibility to my children. My time, when I wasn't at work, was theirs for whatever they needed, whether to talk, to go somewhere, to make something, to watch something with them on TV. Even when I'd been at home studying for my Master's courses, I studied in my bedroom with the door open. They knew that they could come in at any time to ask or tell me something, to have me break up a disagreement, or to help them figure out a homework problem. I would drop whatever I was doing, deal with their issue, and then pick right up where I'd left off. It hadn't been easy to walk away from that for one ten-week summer, and I had to somehow talk myself into three. The only solution to the argument between the two sides of my brain was to tell it that I would just go until circumstances showed me that I should stop. Whereas the pilgrims had outside forces telling them, "You can't do this", I put that responsibility on myself: I would be in charge of weighing the pros and cons each step of the way and saying "I can't do this." I had plenty of justification for not going on, but the justification for continuing had to come from myself. In many ways, having this life-and-death control over one's own dreams is much more difficult.

My agenda of priorities had always been crystal clear to me. I had chosen to be the mother of four children; therefore, my first priority was to be accessible to them. I had also chosen to be the single mother of these children, and in that capacity I needed to be their rock and refuge, the one who stood between them and the chaos of the world. In addition, I needed to create and maintain a social network in my community that would not only provide a support system for me, but would also serve as an extended family of sorts for them. Besides doing all these things, I needed to be a provider, a wage earner who could keep a roof over our heads, food on the table, and a semblance, at least, of economic security and continuity. Once all these matters were attended to, I was free to meet my own needs for intellectual growth with whatever resources were left. These priorities were clear to me on a day-to-day basis, and they provided constant fuel for the argument in my head.

There were several potential stoppers over the next few years. The second summer, when my older son came to be the surrogate parent, the child support checks stopped coming just after I left for school. Since these represented groceries for my children, I had to convince my landlord at home to use my security deposit for a month's rent so that I could pay for these groceries myself. My son wrote to his father, asking whether he didn't care about the welfare of his children. His father replied that if their mother's ego were not so large that she had to keep going to school, she would be able to put food on the table, and that, besides, he knew that she only went there so that she could sleep around. I could laugh at the second barb and consider its source, but the first one burned because it held an element of truth and served to further fuel the argument in my head.

The third summer took two summers because I had run out of older children to be mother's helper. The younger ones, now 18 and 15, wanted to stay alone, but I couldn't see letting them do that for the whole ten weeks. We did five and five, and I lost one year of the seven allowed for completion. When the course work was completed, it was time to prepare for comprehensive exams. I lost another year from an allergic reaction to the mold in my workplace that ruined my vision. When that abated, I prepared for the exams, reading and making questions, and scheduled them for the fall. Two weeks beforehand, I got a call in the middle of the night from a friend of my son's who advised that, if I cared about him, I should get him out of Detroit immediately before he was murdered by a drug dealer who wanted to get even. I did get him out within 24 hours, but I wasn't sure what I was getting. It turned out that he was not addicted himself, not to drugs that is, but to come down from the adrenaline-rush excitement of being the go-to guy on the after-hours club circuit, he was drinking heavily. I was afraid to leave him home for a week while I took the exams, but to bow out of the scheduled date was tantamount to kissing the program good-by. I put him in God's hands, and drove away. It worked out. I took a few months to help him settle into a job and a routine and a few more to catch up with issues that had piled up at work before I could even think about a dissertation.

When it finally seemed that I had done what I could to make my life stable enough to move on, this same son became very ill with a disease that inflamed his spinal cord, caused his arms and legs to spasm and go numb, and threatened his brain stem. The steroids used to treat it caused his blood sugar to rise to the diabetic coma level. He started falling down and not being able to get up. I was terrified that he would die. Months of careful diet, visits to specialists, and physical therapy finally paid off, and he began to regain his strength. He tells me now that I saved his life twice. My own plans and dreams were lost in the middle of this, and it took therapy to help me realize that although I still did not need a PhD, I desperately wanted the intellectual experience of writing a dissertation, just for its own sake. By that time, with all extensions granted, I had a year to do the project from start to finish.

I was right to want the experience. It's been incredible, writing this. The topic is, obviously, dear to my heart, and the pilgrims turned out to be fantastic participants. At the beginning, though, I wasn't so sure about my methodology. I did a practice interview early on, just to get the feel of the procedure. One of my tutors volunteered to be interviewed, and I created a list of prompts based on the themes that I had seen emerging from the literature, questions about turning points, motivation, metacognition, the role of self-narrative. The results of this exercise were appalling. The responses that I got to my probes were totally general, vague, abstract, and boring. It looked to me as if my hopes for writing a dissertation were doomed.

I tried to convince myself that part of the problem had been that I had just met the tutor and didn't know her very well, but I sensed at the same time that there was something wrong with my questions. I really accepted the fact that I was just not a very good interviewer. I decided to write the three introductory chapters first, and then try to rework my interview prompts. After all, I was committed to this methodology, and if I couldn't make it work, that would be the end of it.

In going back to my notes on the literature, I looked closely at Fingeret and Drennon's (1997) interviewing methods. Doing this led me to re-vision my own interview questions in a more chronological way. I started to think of what each pilgrim might say as a kind of literacy biography instead of responses to more thematic questions. This might work. As many of the pilgrims expressed it, I had nothing to lose.

Paralysis set in for about a week before the actual, real, interviews were scheduled. (Actually, I experienced this period of temporary paralysis at the beginning of each stage of the study: the interviews, the transcribing, the analysis, and the writing of the stories.) Dell was first, and, to my utter amazement, the new ordering of my questions worked like magic. Here came stories, illustrations, word pictures, analogies, all the good stuff that I had wanted in the first place. It seemed that simply asking, "What was it like for you to learn to read and write?" unlocked a floodgate, a gold mine, Pandora's box. One thing just let to another, and sometimes I had to literally interrupt to get in a comment or a steering question. This phenomenon was repeated in each and every one of the seven interviews.

I don't discount the fact that I knew these pilgrims fairly well before the interviews were conducted. I'd been through some of their more recent struggles with each of them, if only as a cheerleader on the sidelines. There's something to be said for the old maxim: "A new broom sweeps clean, but the old broom knows where the dirt is." I knew some of their old dirt, although not all of it by any means. My knowledge of them made it easy to relate to what they were saying and to lead them to describing situations that related to things I already knew.

As much as I was familiar with them, however, by focusing our conversation on literacy matters, I found out information that might never have come up in the course of even a close teacher/student relationship. I sensed that most of them had never really been asked about their experiences in this way before, and, therefore, they had never had the opportunity to reflect on their own learning in such an intense way.

I found that this literacy-biography approach to the study worked incredibly well. I'm sure that I missed opportunities during our conversations because of my own agenda, but for the most part I was just terribly pleased with the results. I felt an honesty and directness from each and every one that exceeded my expectations.

As far as the choice of participants goes, I had originally wanted to include four other individuals. Christopher, for instance, is a Hungarian refugee who is trying to write, in English, a book about his experiences as an eleven-year-old when his country was invaded by the Soviet Union. It was his story, told to my dissertation director a year ago, that actually led to this topic and this dissertation. Unfortunately, Christopher has taken this year off from school to work to jobs and couldn't afford the time to be interviewed.

Joy, who is profoundly autistic, was another of the four that I wanted to include. She was classified as retarded until she was twelve, when someone taught her facilitated communication using the computer. She is still non-verbal, but what a writer. She's been an incredibly successful community college student, and she loves to sing the praises of the inclusion she has experienced here. What stopped me from interviewing her was simply the matter of time and deadlines: interviewing her would have taken hours because she types into her little communicator with only two fingers, hours that neither she nor I could spare. Besides, someday she will be someone else's dissertation all by herself.

That brings me to the last two. Marie is a young Haitian mother, who, like many of the pilgrims, has been her own inspiration for continuing her education. She will be the first graduate of our new paralegal program, in addition to which she has, over the last year, composed her own autobiography of her struggle to achieve. Marie has been having health problems this year, as has one of her daughters, so her time has been at a premium. And, finally, Marlena is another senior citizen like Ronnie. She has been a regular client in the writing center for the last five or six years, working on her fictionalized memoirs of her years in the French Resistance during World War II. Marlena has walked with a cane for many years due to an old hip injury, and this year it's become just too hard for her to get around. I would love to have included these stories along with those of the other pilgrims, but I knew and planned at the outset that I would have to confine myself to the pilgrims that were readily available. I think, all in all, that they are a pretty representative group.

As I type these words, I'm struggling to meet my deadline. But I'm glad I tried. If I'm successful, Everest will be conquered. Perhaps the next mountain will be the writing of the book which I've always had on my mind, about that trip my dad took us on. Or perhaps I'll just keep on interviewing and writing the tales of more pilgrims as they come along.

CHAPTER XII

DISCUSSION

As I began the attempt to bring my insights about the pilgrims' narratives into some kind of a cohesive discussion chapter, I was reminded of several picturesque cliches, such as "herding cats" or "nailing Jell-O to the wall". The very exceptionality that I had chosen to focus on and celebrate in my study came back to bite me. How could I transform these individual, idiosyncratic lived experiences into some kind of integrated organic whole?

I've never heard anyone else refer to this phenomenon, but I personally experience on a regular basis a kind of mental screen saver, a visual representation that flashes through my brain when it is between conscious thoughts. The screen saver appears in a small variety of forms, but the most common one is a picture of my own two hands, gathering threads of various hues, textures and thicknesses into three conglomerate strands, and manipulating these strands into a braid, which can later appear as a rock-climbing rope or a trapeze, depending, I guess, on the circumstances of my life at the given moment. Sometimes the braided rope even hangs in thin air with several knots tied at its lower end, and my hands grasp the last knot in a death grip. It seemed fitting to me to apply the braiding image from my mental screensaver to the task at hand.

I will begin by reminding myself and the reader that my research questions as I approached my study were as follows: What put the pilgrims on the path to higher literacy in the first place, and what keeps them on it? The pilgrims seem to fall into two categories regarding the first question. Two of them, Sarah and Komal, appear to have always been on it. Acquiring an increasingly higher level of literacy was an integral part of their lives from childhood. Sarah with her letters to God, her poetry, her reading of one book a day, and Komal, with her absence notes, letters to relatives in India, and newspaper reports to her father, never really had to experience a period of prolonged tension about literacy or a turning point that put them on the path, as Fingeret & Drennon (1997) describe in their spiral model. Ronnie, too, although there was a period of time when being a freight-car hobo put literacy practices out of his reach, still had had literate beginnings with the nuns in his Polish Catholic school which easily came back to him when his life gave them room, i.e., when he experienced the libraries and the literate companions aboard ship.

For the other pilgrims, though, Dell and James and Indiana and Sid, the period of prolonged tension is clearly apparent. Their responses to this tension varied. Dell struggled, James substituted, Indiana avoided, and Sid raged. But eventually, each reached a turning point. Dell found his at his first community college where he was finally allowed to study "things that made sense." James' turning point came when he faced the fact that he couldn't communicate his "stories" through music. For Indiana, there was a two-pronged turning point: the first came when a department assignment and two letters he wanted to write led him to realize that writing was similar to the kind of communication that he customarily did in teaching; and the other came when, as a result of his accident, he was forced to see that writing could be his tool for overcoming some of the obstacles that he faced, and that it could help him reach his goals in new ways. For Sid, the community college and the taped texts gave her access to the path.

Almost all of the pilgrims proceeded, once on the path, to fulfill the other elements of Fingeret & Drennon's spiral model: they all exemplified problem solving and seeking educational opportunities; they all reported changing relationships and/or practices; and they all exhibited (and continue to exhibit) intensive continuing interaction. All except Ronnie, that is. For him, the last three aspects of the spiral model are unclear. One could say that he exhibited problem solving and seeking educational opportunities when he found his way to the writing center. The changing relationships and practices are less clear, unless we count his willingness to practice revision and the fact that he engaged the services of a word-processing person to put his words on disc. As far as continuing interaction, he is still writing for the newspaper, planning his next two books, and learning how to copyright the first one.

What we can see is that all of the pilgrims are indeed on the path, although they arrived there through different routes. Most follow the aspects of Fingeret & Drennon's (1997) spiral model of literacy acquisition. All fulfil Richardson, Okun, & Fisk's (1983) definition of literacy, using reading and writing as operations in service of a goal to accomplish transactions within a given context, although their goals and contexts vary widely.

As for the second question, what keeps them on the path in spite of obstacles, we have to look at issues of motivation, those of purpose, and those of problem-solving strategies. Sometimes it even seemed that purpose became motivation, and other times, that problems became motivation.

When I did my initial review of the literature relating to motivation in adults, I was purposely selective in the material that I included, confining myself to aspects of it that, from what I already knew of my pilgrims, would apply particularly to them. I did not seek to do an exhaustive review of over-arching theories of motivation, although it is clear that the pilgrims' stories could certainly be interpreted in the light of those larger theories that involve attribution, goals, reinforcement and other models. Instead, I chose to focus on notions of self-efficacy, the roles of metacognition and self-narrative, and the role of failure in the motivation that my pilgrims evidenced. With the evidence of the narratives before me, however, I realize that this motivation that they show is a very complicated thing. In his guest editor's comments that preface an issue of The Educational Psychologist devoted to discussion of motivation, Pintrich (1991) describes three general categories of constructs that are relevant to motivation in educational settings as follows:

a) individual's beliefs about their abilities to accomplish a task (self-efficacy, competence, attributional, and control beliefs)

b) their reasons or purposes for engaging in a task (goals, orientation, interest value, intrinsic motivation and critiques)

c) their affective reactions to a task (feelings of anxiety, self-worth, anger, pride, shame, and guilt) (p. 201)

Pintrich goes on to say that these categories contain constructs that have not yet been differentiated, nor have their operational roles been delineated. (p. 201) I chose to look closely at only two of these constructs that he lists, self-efficacy and purposes, or goals, but the pilgrims themselves added affective reactions to a task (or situation), especially those of anxiety, anger, and pride. Although the pilgrims had much to say and give evidence of in these few constructs, and although it was very clear that each showed a self-efficacy or mastery orientation, the motivation picture in operational terms is still a muddy one in many respects. Paris & Turner's (1994) notion of situational motivation, what they see as an interaction between "a trait of the individual and a property of the environment" (p. 233) might also be a generative way to look at the pilgrims' experiences.

The general categories of intrinsic and extrinsic applied to the notion of motivation don't seem terribly useful to me in analyzing my pilgrims' literacy experiences. They all exhibit a certain intrinsic aspect, doing the literacy and the learning and the knowledge gathering for its own sake. And yet many times, for many of them, it is an extrinsic motivation that moves them to particular literacy acts: the need to prepare for a career, to keep a job, or to maintain an important social or cultural entity. Even though one could say that the motivation becomes intrinsic for the pilgrims once their commitment to the path is made, looking at these broad divisions of motivation still seems to me to provide only a part of the story about what keeps the pilgrims going, and a very general one at that.

What proved to supply the deepest insight into the pilgrims' persistence on the path to higher literacy seemed to be an examination of their purposes. When their comments were the most passionate, it seemed that I invariable coded them with a "P" for purpose. The closest agreement among them in purpose was that related to the notion of changing their lives. James was the most clear when he vigorously asserted that he didn't want to be "like that" any more. Dell, too, wanted to be more than a "loser"; he wanted to reach the potential that he knew he had. Ronnie revealed that changing his life was his real purpose only in retrospect, when he described noticing that it was happening: "I knew that my past …was diminishing, and I was following a different dialect." Although Indiana only had a glimmer at first of wanting to change his life by becoming a writer, when his accident changed his life for him, writing was what he turned to to help him live victoriously in that new life. Sarah and Komal didn't verbalize, really, this desire to change their lives the way the other pilgrims did, and yet by their very actions of choosing to move their lives from one country to another, they showed the same purpose. This desire to change their lives is totally intertwined with the pilgrims' literacy efforts, and it is an on-going purpose that reaches into the future. Sid just wanted to be seen, finally as someone with a brain. Fingeret and Drennon (1997) were right when they said that the overriding purpose behind acquiring literacy is to change lives.

To a lesser but still very important extent, Stein's (1995) list of purposes for literacy figures into the motivation picture for all the pilgrims. The purpose of access is closely related to the instances of extrinsic motivation they show—the desire for access into the careers and discourse communities of their choice. This desire for access is closely related to their need for credentials. Even Ronnie, on whom I had trouble pinning a motivation type, clearly wants access to the community of writers. For him, perhaps, the credential is not a degree but a copyright. The desire for access could also be construed an another way of saying that the pilgrims want to be insiders (Delattre, 1983; Fingeret & Drennon, 1997).

The strongest evidence of Stein's (1995) notions of purpose that I found among these pilgrims, however, was for that of achieving a voice. They all have important messages to communicate, and they want to be heard. This desire for a voice is powerful motivation when it relates to the literacy task at hand. The desire for independence, another of Stein's (1995) suggested purposes for literacy, although a somewhat less strong purpose than voice, is still immensely important to the pilgrims, especially when it refers to economic independence. And finally from Stein's (1995) list is the purpose of building a bridge to the future which all the participants exhibit, closely related to Fingeret & Drennon's (1997) notion of "intense continuing interaction" from their spiral model.

An interesting take related to this idea of building a bridge to the future comes from a recent article by Karniol & Ross (1996) in which they attempt to assess the role of what they call "temporal focus" on motivation. They view individuals as "pulled to behave by their conceptions of the future, pushed to act by their recollections of the past, or primarily driven by current exigencies" (p. 593). I wish they had said "and" instead of "or", because if they had, I believe that their insight would apply to all the pilgrims, dealing as they are with past successes and failures, future goals and dreams, and current constraints of time, economics, and family responsibilities. The stories that they tell themselves and that they told to me certainly show the influences that past experiences, present short-term goals, and future dreams and plans have on their persistence.

What is important to remind ourselves of, before we leave this discussion of purposes, is that schooling itself, even when directed toward gaining credentials, is a large purpose for the pilgrims. Mike Rose (1989) expresses this desire for education well in talking about his experiences with the Bay Area Literacy Project:

> It is a very iffy thing, this schooling. But the participants put a lot of stock in it. They believe school will help them, and they are very specific about what they want.... The goals are specific, modest, but they mean a tremendous amount for the assurance they give to these people that they are still somebody, that they can exercise control. (p. 215)

Although the pilgrims in this study have goals that are perhaps not so modest as those of the participants in Rose's literacy project, the pursuit of education does seem to give them the same way of exercising control over their lives. Rose goes on to say, "...literacy, here, is intimately connected with respect, with a sense that they are not beaten, the mastery of print revealing the deepest impulse to survive" (p. 216). For my pilgrims, the impulse goes beyond that of survival: they want to thrive, and they see literacy as the path.

A huge role in keeping the pilgrims on their stony path is played by their own capacities for problem solving. As I mentioned before, it almost seemed to me at times that the mere occurrence of a problem that required a solution to stave off failure not only created the occasion for problem solving, but also created a kind of motivation (Kalsner, 1992; Cavaliere, 1997). So many of the pilgrims were so unwilling to take no for an answer and so determined to persevere, that when one door closed on them, they simply found another one to knock on. Also notable in regard to problem solving was the pilgrims' facility in applying tools that had worked in one situation to the next difficulty that arose.

Several issues that did not come directly from the literature that I surveyed but from the participants themselves need to be discussed here, too. The first is the fear of turning back, especially among those pilgrims who had experienced the limitations that bound them before they began their path to higher literacy. To a person, if they had experienced a time in their lives before reading and writing became central, the notion of giving up the new path was anathema.

Another refrain for many of the pilgrims was a risk-taking attitude, the idea that there is nothing to lose. They want the chance, they want to try, even though failure may be the result. Being told that they can't do something becomes an energizer of motivation in itself. Several, Sid most notably, owned up to a strong role for anger in this part of the process. And if they fail, even the failure becomes instructive and motivational.

And finally the pilgrims, for the most part, present a striking unanimity about the whole concept of giving back, sharing with others that which they have gained. This sharing of knowledge, skill, literacy seems almost instinctive among them. Sometimes it seems to stem from a desire to spare others the pain and isolation that they themselves experienced. Other times it resembles a kind of social solidarity; "If it's good for me, it's good for others, too." And one could speculate that sometimes this sharing of knowledge is a kind of reinforcement, a reminder of what they themselves have overcome and achieved.

Finally, we need to look at the role that the community college itself played in the course of these pilgrims' journeys. I want to draw together some of the things that the various pilgrims had to say in this regard. Regardless of their abilities, their obstacles, their hopes and dreams, they saw the community college as welcoming, respectful of them as persons, full of opportunities for growth, and a source of accessible teaching and guidance toward deeper self-knowledge. It is fair to say in general that the community college setting made a difference to some extent to every one of them, whether because of its developmental approach, its focus on pedagogy, or its open door.

All in all, then, although the pilgrims exemplified many of the traits described in the literature in regard to their development of and uses for literacy, their motivation, and their response to the community college, they added notes of their own about not turning back, about problem solving, and about giving back.

It is important to remember, at this point, that the pilgrims I have chosen for the study were chosen because they are exceptional literacy seekers. In trying to categorize students by type in order to characterize their level of motivation , Covington & Roberts (1994) say of one of their four types "Success-oriented individuals are unique among all the groups in that they elude description.... It appears that these students have moved beyond concerns about ability status and the conventional meaning of success and failure competitively defined" (p. 167-168). The pilgrims have moved in this way, creating their own definitions of success and failure.

CHAPTER XIII

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

It seems strange to be drawing academic, dissertation-like implications and conclusions from the simple yet complex stories of lived experience told by seven ordinary yet exceptional people, but the more I have worked with their words, the more sure I am that strong implications are there among them. At his workshops for leaders in writing-across-the-curriculum programs, Toby Fulwiler used to suggest a simple exercise that we could do with students. He suggested that we have them write for a short while on these two questions: What makes writing hard? What makes writing easier? In a sense, I asked my participants to talk about two similar questions: What makes getting on the stony path to literacy and staying on it hard? What makes it easier? They answered, with their stories, with their insights, with their memories, and with their dreams. Their answers have clear information for us as teachers, and particularly for those of us who teach composition in community colleges.

One thing that makes getting on the path hard is feeling like an outsider. This outsider feeling can come from previous academic defeats, differences in social and cultural backgrounds, lack of understanding of the system, or insufficient self-esteem. Other related difficulties are the fear of making mistakes (which can lead to silence), lack of proper tools and information, and uncooperative teachers.

Among the things that make maintaining one's position on the literacy path easier are experiencing inclusion, learning that mistakes are not fatal, being given a voice, and being shown how the system works. Added to this list of enabling factors are readings that "make sense", teachers who are accessible, and tools and information that will help in problem solving. Reinforcement comes from having successes and from being given the time to develop at their own pace.

I would not presume to articulate a detailed pedagogy that would be guaranteed to create students who are as success-oriented or as committed to achieving ever higher levels of literacy as are the pilgrims in this study. Not only would the attempt be futile, but the same teaching techniques and strategies could not be applied productively in a generic way. As Hourigan (1994) admonishes, "...good pedagogies must always be local ones, changing from one place to another, from one semester to another, often, indeed, from one classroom to another" (p. xviii). This custom approach to pedagogy is especially needed in the community college, whose mission is tailored directly to its community. Although the prescription of specific pedagogies is not appropriate, there are specific stances and attitudes that we can bring to any teaching setting that might enhance our chances of encouraging more such pilgrims.

As we have seen, the greatest source of motivation for the pilgrims comes from their own articulated purposes, whatever those purposes may be. In order for us as teachers to capitalize on this source of motivation, we must be aware of what these purposes are for each of our students and find ways to honor them. In order to know and honor a student's purposes, we must first know and honor the student. As Rose (1989) puts it, "We need an orientation to instruction that provides guidance on how to determine and honor the beliefs and stories, enthusiasms and apprehensions that students reveal" (p. 236). It is not enough for us to merely present content effectively and devise methods of evaluating outcomes. The whole person is at work in this literacy enterprise, and it is the whole person whom we must address. Once again, according to Rose (1989):

> They need opportunites to talk about what they're learning" to test their ideas, reveal their assumptions, talk through the places where new knowledge clashes with ingrained belief. They need a chance, too, to talk about the ways they may have felt excluded from all this in the past and may feel threatened by it in the present. (p. 194)

Many of the pilgrims, and I include myself in this group, found their major source of purpose in pursuing higher literacy in the need for credentials. We could see this kind of extrinsic motivation as a quality somewhat inferior to the pure desire for learning-for-learning's sake. And yet we have seen in many of these same pilgrims, including myself, that the extrinsic motivation was simple the obvious, practical vehicle to get them into school. It was easy to see in these individuals that the intrinsic desire for knowledge lay just beneath the surface of this ostensibly pragmatic veneer. And we also saw, particularly in the women pilgrims, I think, that on the journey to simple credentials, much more earth-shaking transformation was occurring in these lives. Understanding these two factors should help us in achieving a deeper understanding and respect for the forces that push students into our classrooms. As Hourigan (1994) says, "Our students' desires for vocational skills must not always be perceived as a problem to be solved" (p. 126). No matter what gets them on the path, the ultimate destination is bound to be much greater than they'd expected.

We can come to better know students in their wholeness in a variety of ways. As composition teachers we can choose to use reading and writing assignments that are inclusive and that allow students to bring who they are to the reading and writing tasks. These assignments could include readings that are multicultural in a broad sense, writing tasks that include a component of narrative that gives room for a student's voice to be heard, and research projects that are self-sponsored and come out of the student's own need to know. Too often, I think, we move away from personal narrative quite rapidly in composition classes to make room for more "academic" writing tasks, instead of helping students to realize that there is always a place for narrative, even in the most analytic kind of writing. And too often we assign generic research topics without regard for students' own interests and purposes.

One of the best ways, I think, to come to know students is to let them come to know us, not just as purveyors of the commodity called knowledge, but also both as fellow travelers on the same path to higher literacy and understanding, and as whole human beings ourselves with our own uncertainties and questions. Too often, I think, we expect that we must present a pure and objective image of ourselves to a class, when in actuality we might do more good by betraying our own struggles with blind spots and weaknesses. I remember a story that Regina Hoover told to us in our first or second class with her about being denied access to a doctoral program in 1940 because she was a woman, who would just get married, have babies, and never use the wonderful knowledge that the program would bestow on her. She persisted, but the residual terror and shame of that initial rejection rendered her paralyzed at her first, big doctoral exam. She couldn't write one word; nothing came out. Her story helped me immensely at a very shaky time on my own literacy journey. Schunk (1989) refers to pedagogies like this one as a "coping model" (p. 101) and contrasts it to a mastery model.

We can also make sure that students who are afraid to use their voice in the larger class (because they might make a mistake and say something stupid) have a chance to experience the safety of a carefully orchestrated small group discussion in which to try out their voices and get enough feedback to help them be comfortable. This small group activity will also help them to see that there are others as unsure and lacking in confidence as they are and make them more willing to disclose their questions and misunderstandings. It is only when these questions come to light that we can find ways to lead students toward answers that are meaningful to them. They need to articulate the problem before we can supply any meaningful solution. And it is only when they have the chance to practice their voices in a safe place that they can grow in the confidence to use them in places outside the classroom where there might be more risk involved.

Since we've seen that many of the pilgrims have developed sophisticated metacognitive practices in relation to their own studying, it might be useful for us to take the time in a classroom to let all our students in on these strategies. It may be the first time for many of them to really think about their own thinking and how they do it instead of merely comparing their results to those of others and coming up short.

And finally, I see in the pilgrims' experiences a need for us, even though our job is to teach composition, to be very aware of the workings of our own institution, its programs and its rules, its resources and its services. As teachers of a subject that is required of everyone, we are in a unique position to pass on information to students that might make the difference between their success and failure. If problem solving is, indeed, a common characteristic of those who have succeeded, sharing problem-solving tools as much as we can should produce more success.

A final common characteristic of the pilgrims in the study was their unwillingness to be told that they couldn't do something. They wanted the chance to try, even though to an outsider it might seem that the odds were stacked against them. Perhaps we can take this as a message that we should not take the role of naysayer with students, thus adding ourselves to the obstacles that already lie in their paths.

I can't help thinking right now about the enthusiastic cooperation the pilgrims showed to me in the course of my study, and the generous audience that my dissertation director has been as I've written. I remember speaking on behalf of the affected students at Sid's welfare forum, because it was important to her and she asked me to. And I remember accompanying Komal's Muslim Club on a hiking field trip when the advisor was unavailable at the last minute, because it was important to her and she asked me to. I'm seeing all these different things as collaborations, one person responding to the project and passion of another and catching the enthusiasm from her. I think that this is the kind of response that students are looking for from us, that we notice what they are passionate about and lend our expertise and enthusiasm to their efforts to achieve. They want us to be a generous audience and enthusiastic collaborators, not just for their writing, but for their whole journey.

Ultimately, as we can see in many of the pilgrims' stories, their goal for pursuing enhanced literacy is to overcome limitation and achieve a greater degree of freedom. They know only too well that a lack of certain kinds of literacy gets in their way and prevents them from being and doing that which they envision for themselves. They are willing to risk all in the pursuit of what they perceive to be the key to enlarged freedom. With the increasing freedom that they find as they add intellectual achievement and self-knowledge, comes a desire for more literacy, and the cycle continues. This is the literacy enterprise, and we have the opportunity to participate in it.

What the pilgrims' answers to these questions about their literacy paths mean to us in a larger sense, then, is that we as composition teachers in the community college can be more than we might think we are. We can be, if we choose, true literacy workers, charged with helping to provide the tools that make their staying on the literacy path easier. This fact is especially true because our field is composition, whose subject is language, which is so close to the individual's identity and voice. We must stay aware not only of our content but also of their purposes, plans, problems, and dreams.

In their notion of situational motivation, Paris & Turner (1994) envision a pedagogy that pays attention to the complexity of motivational factors that keeps students on the path to learning. "The high road to thoughtfulness and mindfulness in the classroom must follow a route that allows students choices, challenges, control, and collaboration" (p. 227). Certainly we have seen that all of the pilgrims have benefited from these four conditions.

The pilgrims have learned for themselves some of the things that make their literacy journeys easier. They use these learnings as mantras and affirmations, and they share them with others as they see the need before them. They have shared them with me as I've been writing, and they've helped to keep me from quitting. "Never give up," they say. "I know what I'm capable of. I deserve a chance. I've done something like this before. I won't take 'no' for an answer. There's always a way." As literacy workers we need to know these mantras, too, and we need to share them with the students we come in contact with.

An additional implication of my study is, I think, that the sheer doing of such a study is valuable to the researcher in terms of enlarging her understanding and respect for those whom she is charged to teach. "Most importantly", Hourigan (1996) states, "we must become students of our own students' literacies, for in learning from one another and from our students, we may avoid harm" (p. 97). More such case studies need to be done, by me and others, to add more details to the picture of successful literacy seekers, and to find more ways to do no harm, "...to sit close by", according to Rose (1989), "as people use language and consider, as we listen, the orientations that limit our field of vision" (p. 205). And when the stories are composed, they need to be shared. As Hourigan says:

> . . . we must share our stories and the stories of our students with others, at conferences, in articles, in conversations. Most importantly, we must become students of our students' literacies, for in learning from one another and from our students, we may avoid harm. (p. 97)

For each of these seven pilgrims that I've included in my study, perhaps at any given time, ten stand behind them. And behind those tens stand perhaps hundreds of others who have not yet reached the turning point, although they might be just on the verge. Probably the first time each of these pilgrims appeared on the campus, he or she did not appear exceptional. There were no signs on foreheads proclaiming "Spend your effort on me. I'm worth it because I'm going to be exceptional". No, there are no identifying tags. They come as strangers, unknown in their potential exceptionality. Therefore, we can't save our best for the exceptional. We have to give our best to everyone, because we will never know.

References

Beitler, M. A. (1997). Midlife adults in self-directed learning: A heuristic study in progress. In H. Long & Associates (Eds.), Expanding horizons in self-directed learning (pp. 269-279). Norman, OK: College of Education, University of Oklahoma.

Belenky, M. F., Clinchy, B. M., Goldberger, N. R., & Tarule, J. M. (1986) Women's ways of knowing: The development of self, voice and mind. New York: Basic Books.

Brandt, D. (1990). Literacy and knowledge. In A. Lunsford, H. Moglen, & J. Slevin (Eds.), The right to literacy (pp. 189-196). New York: MLA.

Brunner, D. D. (1994). Inquiry and reflection. Albany, NY: SUNY.

Carroll, A. (Ed.). (1997). Letters of a nation: A collection of extraordinary American Letters. New York: Broadway Books.

Cavaliere, L. A. (1997. The processes of adult learning: Failure as feedback for motivation. PAACE Journal of Lifelong Learning, 6, 9-17.

Chaplin, M. T. (1993). Capturing a chameleon called literacy. In G. M. Sill, M. T. Chaplin, J. Ritzke, & D. Wilson (Eds.), Opening the American mind: Race, ethnicity and gender in higher education (pp. 193-203). Newark: University of Delaware Press.

Coles, R. (1989). The call of stories: Teaching and the moral imagination. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Covington, M.V. & Roberts, B.W. (1994). Self-worth and college achievement: Motivation and personality correlates. In P.R. Pitnrich, D.R. Brown, & C.E. Weinstein, (Eds.), Student motivation, cognition, and learning: Essays in honor of Wilbert J. McKeachie (p. 157-181). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Daniell, B. (1990). The situation of literacy and cognition. In A. Lunsford, H. Moglen, & J. Slevin (Eds.), The right to literacy (pp. 197-207). New York: MLA.

Delattre, E. J. (1983). The insiders. In R. Bailey & R. M. Fosheim (Eds.), Literacy for life: The demand for reading and writing. New York: MLA.

Fingeret, H. A., & Drennon, C. (1997). Literacy for life: Adult learners, new practices. New York: Columbia Teachers College Press.

Gilligan, C. (1982). In a different voice:Psychological theory and women's development. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Hourigan, M. M. (1994). Literacy as social exchange: Intersections of class, gender, and culture. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Howard, J. & Obertz, W.S. (1998). Community college literacy: Is the middle right. In M. C. Smith (Ed.), Literacy for the twenty-first century: Research, policy, practices, and the National Adult Literacy Survey (pp. 125-158). Westport, CT: Praeger.

Huberman, M. (1995). Working with life-history narratives. In H. McEwan & K. Egan (Eds.), Narrative in teaching, learning and research (pp. 127-165). New York: Teachers College, Columbia University.

Kalsner, L. (1992). The influence of developmental and emotional factors in success in college. Higher Education Extension Services Review, 3 (2), 3-12.

Karniol, R. & Ross, M. (1996). The motivational impact of temporal focus: Thinking about the future and the past. Annual Review of Psychology 47: 593-620.

Kashima, Y. (1997). Culture, narrative and human motivation. In D. Munro, J. F.

Schumaker, & S. C. Carr (Eds.), Motivation and culture (pp 3-15). New York: Routledge.

Knoblauch, C. H. (1990). Literacy and the politics of education. In A. Lunsford, H. Moglen, & J. Slevin, (Eds.), The right to literacy (pp. 74-80). New York: MLA.

Lather, P. (1991). Getting smart: Feminist research and pedagogy with/in the postmodern. New York: Routledge.

Lytle, S. L. & Wolfe, M. (1989). Adult literacy education: Program evaluation and learner assessment. Columbus, OH: ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, Ohio State University. (ED 315-665)

Mackall, J. (1997). Porch stories: A narrative look at the stories and the storytelling traditions of the places my students and I call home. Dissertation Abstracts International, 58, 3911A. (University Microfilms No. 9811006)

Martone, M. (1997). Stories we tell ourselves. In J. F. Trimmer (Ed.), Narration as knowledge: Tales of the teaching life (pp. 1-11). Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.

Merrifield, J., Brugman, M. B., Hemphill, D. &Bennett de Marrais, K. P. (1997). Life at the margins: Literacy, language and technology in everyday life. New York: Columbia Teachers College Press.

Mohr, E. (1999). The writing center: An opportunity in democracy. Teaching English the Two Year College 26 , 419-426.

Munro, D. (1997). Levels and processes in motivation and culture. In D. Munro, J. F. Schumaker, & S. C. Carr (Eds.), Motivation and Culture (pp. 16-32). New York: Routledge.

National center for educational statistics: Digest of educational statistics 1998.

Washington, DC: U.S. Office of Education Research and Improvement. NCES 1999-036.

Needham, M. L. (1994). The New Breed of College Students. In M. Reynolds, (Ed.), Two-Year college english: Essays for a new century (pp. 16-25). Urbana: NCTE, 1994.

Newman, A. P. & Beverstock, C. (1990). Adult literacy: Contexts and challenges. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Nicolini, M.B. (1984). Stories can save us: A defense of narrative writing. English Journal, February, 56-61.

Noddings, N. & Witherell, C. (1991). Epilogue: Themes remembered and foreseen. In C. Witherell & N. Noddings (Eds.), Stories lives tell: Narrative and dialogue in education (p. 279-280). New York: Teachers College, Columbia University.

Paris, S. & Parecki, A. (1993). Metacognitive aspects of adult literacy. Washington, DC: Office of Educational Research and Improvement. Report No: NCAL-TR-93-9 ED#363-734.

Paris, S.G. & Turner, J.C. (1994). Situational motivation. In P.R. Pintrich, D.R. Brown, & C.E. Weinstein, (Eds.), Student motivation, cognition and learning: Essays in honor of Wilbert J. McKeachie (pp. 213-238). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Pickett, N. A. (1998). The two-Year college as democracy in action. College Composition and Communication 49(1), 90-98.

Pintrich, P.R., Marx, R.W., & Boyle, R. (1993). Beyond cold conceptual change: The role of motivational beliefs and classroom contextual factors in the process of conceptual change. Review of Educational Research 63: 2, 167-199.

Power, S. G. (1983). The politics of literacy. In R. Bailey & R. M. Fosheim (Eds.), Literacy for life: The demand for reading and writing (pp.21-29). New York: MLA.

Reder, S. (1998). Literacy selection and literacy development: Structural equation models of the reciprocal effects of education and literacy. In M. C. Smith (Ed.), Literacy for the twenty-first century: Research, policy, practices, and the National Adult Literacy Survey (pp. 139-157). Westport, CT: Praeger.

Richardson, R. C., Fisk, E. C. and Okun, M. A. (1983). Literacy in the open-access college. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Rose, M. (1989). Lives on the boundary. New York: MacMillan.

Stein, S.G. (1995). Equipped for the future: A consumer-driven vision for adult literacy and lifelong learning. Washington, DC: National Institute for Literacy.

Villanueva, V. (1993). Bootstraps: From an American academic of color. Urbana, IL: NCTE.

Wagner, D. A. (1986). When literacy isn't reading. In M. E. Wrolstad and D. F. Fisher (Eds.), Toward a new understanding of literacy (pp. 319-331). New York: Praeger.

West, L. (1996). Beyond fragments: Adults, motivation and higher education. Exeter, England: Taylor and Francis.

Wigg, E. H. (1994). Personal perspectives on adult education issues. In P. J. Gerber and H. B. Ruff (Eds.), Learning disabilities in adulthood: Persisting problems and evolving issues (pp.163-187). Boston: Andover Medical Publishers.

Wlodkowski, R. J. (1985). Enhancing adult motivation to learn. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Wlodkowski, R. J. & Ginsberg, M. B. (1995). Diversity and motivation. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

APPENDIX A

List of Interview Topics and Questions

Prior life experience
Life at the community college
Life outside the community college
Relationships and social support
Old relationships and new practices
Interest in becoming insider
Interest in changing life
Use of literacy to overcome obstacles
Motivation: extrinsic or intrinsic
    economic necessity
    social pressure
    personal desire
    individual initiative
    desire for knowledge
How has literacy changed you?
Does enhanced literacy increase your sense of power?
Five stages in the spiral model
    prolonged tension
    turning point
    problem solving and seeking educational opportunities
    changing relationships and practices
    intensive continuing interaction
Evidence of six factors contributing to motivation
    attitude
    need
    stimulation
    affect
    competence
    reinforcement
How does self-narrative affect problem-solving and motivation?
How are self-narratives and metacognition connected?
Role of and response to failure
Role of the nature of the community college in success
What sustains the pursuit of literacy for you?

APPENDIX B

DRAFT TRANSCRIPT OF SARAH INTERVIEW

AUTHOR: Tell me about your beginnings in reading and writing.

SARAH: Used to write letters to God, ask him to fix things
Learning writing and reading was fun, read a lot, reading before school (reading and writing in Swedish). Read fast, a book a day, school was always good. Through High school, lucky with reading and writing teachers. Got A's in English but never in Swedish. Always put in effort. Wrote a lot of poetry in Swedish. Stopped when I cam here (21), lost touch with my language because I didn't hear it anymore, not as comfortable writing in English. Began again in your class at 24.

A. did you miss it?

S. Yeah, I did. Felt like I lost a part of myself, an expressive,....
First love poem in English 2 years ago.

A. college in sweden?

S.No. finished high school at 19 and started working. Took one university course, Hebrew. Saving money to leave. Came to US to be in orthodox community to explore that part of myself. Family not orthodox, spent a lot of time in Israel but wanted to see something else. Wanted to travel, planned to come for a year and then go back to Israel, but then...
Went to seminary for 2 years (23), Jewish Rennaisance center, for women like myself that didn't grown up orthodox and wanted to learn about their heritage. Classes in English. Hard in the beginning, still don't relate to English the way I do to Swedish. It was hard. Never got discouraged. Always put an effort into learning English. Read books out loud to myself, made an attempt to imitate perfectly. Didn't want to have an accent (she and mom and sister pick up accents unconsciously). In Israel, learned to speak English with an Israeli accent

A. wanting to speak correctly
language close to person, maybe wanting to fit in.

S. Oh, definitely. Also conscious with employers, authority figures. People don't correct me, but that bothers me. I want them to. Don't want to make mistakes. I want to be able to speak professionally. Same in writing.

Your class was my first English class, very important class to me. Learned a lot about writing. Took the edge off, not so nervous anymore.

A seminary for 2 years, got married (94), worked to 97 and came to school (27) why did you come back to school?
S. always wanted to go to school, get a degree, recognized its importance in US. Also thirst for knowledge and use my brain.

A. Hard?

S. hard at first, different from Sweden. Problem with disrepectful students and disorganized classes. Used to raising hands, not speaking without permission, old fashioned, disciplined, I liked it. With student blurting out I didn't get a chance to show the teacher that I knew the material, sitting in my corner saying nothing because I didn't have the guts to just blurt it out. I do it now, I learned quickly. Nervous about first Scantron test. Strange system. Why are they making it so easy. But it wasn't.

A. literacy beyond reading and writing?
Literacy of the American institution?

S. Yeah, I did. Also because I was an older student and related differently to the teacher than the younger students.

A. How long did it take for you to talk?

S. by summer, a year, not first semester. Like to sit in the back of the class and watch and figure it out, how teacher relates. Admire teachers.

A. experiences here of something too hard?

S. organic chemistry almost killed me. But I never really felt there was something too hard for me. Felt challenged, but not to give up. Used every resource – tutors, books – I had to work for it.

A. which resource first?

S. teacher first. Tutor second. Not really other students, additional books, internet gradually.

A. unfair things asked of you?

S. yeah, some teachers asked for too much, or could not stick to subject, heavy work load, but not to the point that I couldn't do it.

A. ever failed at anything?

S. I'm a perfectionist, so getting a B in chemistry I guess is a failure for me. Big frustration. Bad things from teacher, angry, he punched people under the belt.

A. in that case, what did you do with that feeling? Did it make you want to give up?

S. No. I wanted to kick his ass. It pushed me forward. It made me want to go to the department head. I knew that it wasn't that I wasn't intelligent enough, in just knew that I lacked the math, or that I could've done it if I was better prepared.

A. next chemistry?

S. different, not math-based. Teacher not in touch, book sucked. Second B.

A. Whose idea was it to buy other books?

S. my friend tom

A. that's what I meant when I asked do you turn to other students

S. oh, yeah, I did.

A. How about now at NYU?

S. 2 classes – computer class taught not by a teach but a dietician. Makes a big, big difference. I want teachers. I don't care if you're a dietician. Share your experience with me on your coffee break. Please don't teach me in class. So against that.

A. what is it about teachers?

S. teachers are teachers. They know how to teach. It doesn't matter what the subject is. They just know how to talk to you. He doesn't know how to explain things. He says "push this button", I think, "tell me why". He doesn't challenge me.
Other class is the kind where you curse the teacher out all semester and thank him at the end. World cultures requirement, only class open was Ancient Israel (ironic). Mostly based on Bible. Writing a 10-page paper this week and he has pushed me to my limit and it is so—great!

A. what do you mean pushed?

S. in the first place, he talks to me as an adult, if you ask for help, he gives you a challenge, offers you an idea. I think "just tell me what to do". NYU library, 14 floors. Nobody ever goes there because it's too intimidating. He gave assignment needing books only to be found in the NYU library (I know because I looked everywhere else first). You have to go in, use the computer, find the book. For this paper you have to use journals, books, on-line sources, the whole range. You have to find them. Gets you to work and use resources and write a very professional paper. I came up with a topic and sent him a long e-mail which I don't think the other students did. And he e-mailed back and rearranged the whole thing into something that was much harder, and I can appreciate it. My paper's going to be fabulous. He showed me how to do it in a more professional way than I've ever done before, it's a real research paper and I'm so excited (I'm such a nerd). So even if I get a B on the paper, I've learned something, from him I'm learning.

A. and you're going to be more comfortable using the NYU library?

S. Absolutely. I can find anything. Others are avoiding it. I say "I know how to do it. I'll help you". So he pushed me.

A. Do you help other students?

S. Yeah, I help two other kids. It's not so hard once you figure it out.

A. Where from here/

S. I want to write books, I want to write a book about my family because my family is interesting. Not entirely based on truth—too many parts we don't know, so I'd have to make that up. I also want to write books about diabetes. I want to write a cookbook with my husband-to-be. We cook together, and I want to make a book together. I'm getting into the science part of nutrition more, so maybe research or even teaching. Teaching is, education is, a gift that I have received from so many teachers and I wouldn't mind giving that back to somebody who can appreciate it – adults. I don't see that I'm limited in terms of age and years, I see it as a lifelong thing.

A. No limitations on capabilities?

S. No. might take longer with a family.

A. when you came to this country, you were interested in changing your life, wanted something different for yourself/

S. yeah

A. same when you came here to school?

S. Yeah. RCC changed my life. Safe environment for me. I was free to develop without, not a high pressure place. At first I thought, "I can't do it", but it allowed me to develop at my own pace which is what I needed, nervous because of the language. More mature decision and I have had the time of my life here. I've met wonderful, wonderful people, students and teachers, and I have learned so much, such a great place to start off.

A. so it made a difference to you that is was a community college that was open and teachers had more time?

S. I felt embraced here, people weren't holding you back, felt respected by teachers and that means a lot.

A. nobody created roadblocks for you?

S. just 1 or 2 teachers, not worth discussing. It opened up more opportunities than I though it would. I felt taken care of when I needed it. I needed to be here. And I think I got the best out of it. Very precious.

A. There's a sense in which you got the best because you knew how to get it. Do you sense that you know how to get things out of the system that exists?

S. Yeah, it took me a while to learn it. I mean I used every single resource that's here, writing center, teachers, computers, everything. If I needed help, I went and I got it. I learned how to ask questions, because I never knew how to do that. I'm part of the lost computer generation, ask questions all the time in computer class, slow down, don't go so fast, go over it. I never used to be like that. I'm paying a lot of money for that course and I'm going to get what I need. That's probably what changed in me. I'm a little bit more of a go-getter now.

A. Do you think your motivation is more about economics or wanting to learn, fit in?

S. combination of all. Biggest part is wanting to learn because God blessed me with a brain and I should use it and I see that I've developed areas of my brain that I didn't think existed and I'm fascinated by that cause I've seen that I can learn anything including chemistry. One part – I like a challenge. Of course I want to get a degree. We're judged based on that in the society. And I want to pay my bills. But I know that on breaks when I'm not taking classes I'm very unsatisfied and school keeps me going and working. I can converse with people and express myself and learn from them. I express intelligently.

A. does it help you when you're going to do the next hard thing to look back at challenges you've met? do you tell stories to yourself about your journey?

S. yeah, you have to do that because you forget otherwise. Yeah I do that, I go back, I do.

A. do you think you've learned things about how you learn?

S. Yeah, I create patterns for myself. When there's a task, I kind of make up a schedule for myself, how to go about it. And if I feel confused and don't know how to start, I seek somebody's help, an expert. I learn differently now than I used to. I recognize that I learn more than one way. It's not just reading it, it's writing it, it's seeing it, it's hearing it. I try to combine all those components.

A. How did you learn that?

S. because I learned by trial and error that if I do it that way I retain more. Anatomy & Physiology, with a lab so you visualize, showed me that. I tell that to the kids I tutor. I read things aloud to myself, 5 times is the magic number. Write it with my own hand. Typing with the computer I don't learn as well. We all have our schticks. Very clear on how I learn. Pretend explaining it to someone else. Learning takes a lot of effort.

A. so you've developed a lot of strategies.

S. yeah, I have.

A. are you proving something?

S. yeah, it gives me a kick to get a good grade.

A. (shares with Sarah the "stubborn streak evidenced by some of the other participants)

S. Yeah. But it was only after I started getting A's that I started consciously going after them. Going for grades may be childish, but it helps a person because while you're going for that A you're learning, you still have the knowledge. Feels good to know my parents are proud of me.

A. last words?

S. need to keep an open mind. This class, for instance, is forcing me to use academic sources instead of religious sources (paper on Book of Ruth). Internal resistance because of orthodoxy, but enjoyed the different perspective.

A. cultural tightrope?

S. right, which I think is important. But I can keep my mind open and allow myself to learn without feeling threatened by others' beliefs.

APPENDIX C

List of Coding Categories

A - acquisition (Fingeret and Drennon's Spiral Model)
AN - anger
C - cultural aspects
CCA - community college accessibility
CCD- developmental nature of community college
CCL - community college literacy situation
CCP pedgagogy-centeredness of community college
D - definitions of literacy
E - effects of literacy
F - uses of failure
GB - giving back
IO - insider/outsider
KL - knowledge and literacy
LKH - literate know-how
M - metacognition
MT - motivation types
N - uses of narrative
P - purposes
PO - power
POS - positivity
PW - pedagogy for motivation
PS - problem-solving
S - social aspects of literacy
T - teachers
TB - turning back
WC - writing center